















SIR ANTHONY'S SECRET

OR

A FALSE POSITION

ADELINE SERGEANT

AUTHOR OF "JACOBI'S WIFE," "UNDER FALSE PRETENCES," ETC.



NEW YORK

JOHN A. TAYLOR AND COMPANY

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SIR ANTHONY'S SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

LADY KESTERTON'S PLANS.

"I THINK I may confidently assert," said Lady Kesterton, "that my son's wife, whoever she may be, will be a very happy woman."

"Yes?" said the listener. Then, feeling that more than a mere interrogation was required, the Honorable Eva Lester hastened to add sweetly, "I am sure you are right, dear Lady Kesterton."

"And," said Sir Anthony Kesterton's mother, with majestic urbanity, "not only a happy, but a very fortunate woman too."

"I am sure of that," said Miss Lester, in so low a tone that the sentence was hardly audible to her hostess's ears. But perhaps Miss Lester did not mean it to be heard, for it expressed more feeling than she would have thought it consistent with good breeding to show. Fortunately, Lady Kesterton was a little deaf.

Old Lady Kesterton had once been a beauty. She was now a very angular old dame, stiff as buckram and whalebone could make her, with white hair, nutcracker nose and chin, dark eyes that still were bright,

and the grand air of one who had been accustomed all her life to be treated with deference. She had claims to authority and distinction which she never allowed those around her to forget. She came of a very ancient family, and she had been enriched, early in life, with a large fortune, left to her by a bachelor uncle, and settled upon herself before her marriage with Sir Giles Kesterton, of Kesterton Park. The possession of this money increased her pretensions to respect. She was of an economical turn of mind, and managed her own affairs and those of the respectable Sir Giles with exemplary skill. When Sir Giles died, she managed better than ever. So that now-now when her son, Sir Anthony, was close upon thirty years of age-Lady Kesterton's fortune was reputed to be three times the amount that had been left to her. Moreover, the disposition of it lay entirely in her own hands. Anthony had the title, of course, and the house and the landed property; but the estate was not a valuable one, and, without the prospects of Lady Kesterton's thousands, Sir Anthony's position would have been anything but brilliant.

Two or three wise people shook their heads, and said it would be pleasanter for Anthony Kesterton if he had not to depend so largely upon his mother. But the plan did not work at all badly. Lady Kesterton was not niggardly to her son, although she was a good woman of business. She liked him to spend money—not profusely, but in proportion to his position in the world. She liked him to travel, and to have expensive rooms in London, and to invite his friends to his house, like other young men. She had not refurnished the drawing-room simply because she was waiting for Anthony's intention of marriage to declare itself. When his bride

was chosen it was understood that she was prepared to spend money to any extent. Indeed, Lady Kesterton was particularly generous to him; especially when one remembers that she had rigid evangelical religious views, and looked upon many pleasant and harmless things as worldly, wicked, and altogether abominable. But her love for her son counterbalanced a great deal of Calvinistic sentiment.

It was a pity that Sir Anthony was not a more satisfactory son to her. He was satisfactory in externals-nobody could deny that. He was distinguished-looking, always well dressed, always deferential in manner. He was respectable, moreover: that is, he had apparently no low tastes or evil proclivities. But he was not cut out for the rôle of a country gentleman, and that rôle had always seemed to Lady Kesterton the highest in the world. She was too old-fashioned to have quite divested herself of the idea that it was below a gentleman's dignity to be studious; that it would be eem him better to be anxious about the preserves, to look after the kennels and the stud, rather than to spend a sunshiny September day sometimes in his library over a well-thumbed volume of the classics. Anthony's tastes were not her tastes at all. He was curious in editions, and luxurious in the matter of bookbinding; he had something of a passion for antiquarian lore. Architecture and painting came in for a share of his attention, and he had begun of late to develop a liking for old china and dainty bits of metal work. Lady Kesterton thought these tastes unmanly in the extreme. To add to her sorrows, he had complained so bitterly of her unimaginative, stolid, British cook that she had been compelled to satisfy him by engaging a French chef (at something extravagant the year) in order to gratify his liking for what she called "foreign kickshaws." Sir Anthony laid the blame on his digestion; but Lady Kesterton was only so much the more contemptuous. For what Kesterton had ever thought about his digestion before? she queried grimly. To which Sir Anthony blandly made the very obvious reply, that if they had thought about it more, he might possibly have had to think about it less.

But all these shortcomings were to be forgiven, and all his tastes consulted, if Anthony would but gratify his mother in one direction. She longed—day by day more intensely-for Anthony to marry. She wanted to see him with a suitable wife at his side, and with children growing up about him. She had fleeting visions of manly, rollicking boys and graceful little girls, with whom she was prepared to act the doating grandmother. With Anthony's wife and family to manage, to dose, to preach to and domineer over, she knew that she would have no lonely, sombre days, as she now had, when he was in London or on the Continent; for she had not the slightest intention of being turned out of the house when Anthony married. She would still be queen of the Park, and Anthony would never forget his courteous and conciliatory ways. "It would hardly be worth his while to quarrel with me," she said to herself, with a rather cynical smile; for the good old lady had a fair amount of worldly wisdom and a knowledge of the weaknesses of human nature But she was prepared to be kind to Anthony and Anthony's wife, if they were properly civil to her. As she had remarked this afternoon to Miss Lester, she considered that the future Lady Kesterton would be a very happy and fortunate woman.

Up to a certain point, Miss Lester agreed with her. Otherwise, indeed, she would never have come to Kesterton Park, which was not a particularly lively place to visit. But everybody knew why old Lady Kesterton every now and then asked a perfectly eligible and good-looking young lady to stay with her. The young lady was to make herself agreeable to Sir Anthony, on the understanding that if he chose to propose to her Lady Kesterton would not object. Some young ladies absolutely refused to go to the Park at all on these grounds-"to be on view," as they termed it. Others were not so particular. On the other hand, there was a certain distinction in being selected by Lady Kesterton as a possible daughter-in-law. It meant that your pedigree was unimpeachable, your family reputation stainless, and your personal endowment of grace and beauty up to a fairly high standard. In short, to be invited to Kesterton Park was a sort of certificate of good breeding. And Miss Lester knew it.

The Honorable Eva Lester was six-and-twenty, and looked older than her years. But she was admirably connected, and, as Lady Kesterton was heard to say, "remarkably elegant." She would have been very well satisfied with Eva Lester for a daughter-in-law.

As the two ladies sat together in the drawing-room, Lady Kesterton surveyed Miss Lester critically, and thought that she was looking her best. The young lady's cheeks had flushed a little during the conversation, and a color was always becoming to Miss Lester, of whose face and expression coldness was a distinguishing characteristic. She was nearly always pale, and her regular features seldom betrayed her feelings. Her nose was somewhat unusually long, and her upper lip

likewise. Her abundant pale-colored hair was elaborately dressed, and her gowns were always well-fitting and becoming. Miss Lester's hair and gowns, and her tall, slender figure, constituted her chief claims to distinction; for the regular features, gray-blue eyes and almost colorless eyebrows and lashes of her face, sometimes left an impression of utter commonplaceness upon the mind of an observer. Lady Kesterton always maintained, however, that Eva would grow handsomer with advancing years.

She wore on this occasion a very pale blue dress, with silver ornaments, and sat upright in one of the highbacked chairs in a way which Lady Kesterton approved. There was never any approach to lounging or to slovenliness in Eva's appearance or attitudes. She was always erect, dignified, unapproachable. One could not imagine that a speck of dirt would ever adhere to that smooth clear skin, or that those elaborate braids of hair could ever be disarranged. Lady Kesterton looked and approved. She also could be severe, erect, and dignified; her snow-white curls, her stiff black satins, magnificent velvets, and antique laces were as perfect in their details as Eva's modest gowns; there was something a little fierce even in the old lady's gold-rimmed eyeglasses and judicial frown which was apt to frighten timid persons. Yet, fierce and rigid as she appeared, there was a far warmer heart and finer nature beneath that somewhat repelling exterior than could be found in all the cultivated personality of the Honorable Eva Lester

[&]quot;Do you know where Anthony has gone, my dear?" Lady Kesterton inquired.

[&]quot;He spoke of the fir plantation at the back of the

West Lodge," said Eva. "I think he must have been going in that direction."

"I should rather like a little walk," said the old lady reflectively. "If you have no objection, my dear, we will take a turn in the park. I have not been out to-day."

"I shall be delighted," Miss Lester replied. Then, glancing out of one of the windows, she said, "There is Philip on the terrace; shall he come too?"

"What a nuisance boys are!" exclaimed Lady Kesterton, rather crossly. "Always in the way! I cannot think why Anthony likes to have him here. However,"—after a moment's hesitation—"he may be useful to us. Call him and tell him that he can carry my basket for me. I am going to take some wine and jelly to the lodge-keeper's wife."

She took up her ebony gold-mounted staff, which she used more as a symbol of authority than a means of support, while Miss Lester opened the window and beckoned to the boy upon the terrace. A momentary smile flickered on her lips as she did so. Lady Kesterton's mind was an open volume to her; and in the order conveyed to Philip Winyates she read the conviction of the old lady that a party of four was sometimes more convenient than one of three, and that if Sir Anthony happened to be met on the road, he could escort Miss Lester, while the boy Philip afforded his companionship to Lady Kesterton.

Eva's eyes rested on a pleasant scene as she stood at the drawing-room window. Before the house ran the terrace with its stately stone balustrades garlanded with Virginia creeper, and its tall vases overflowing with geranium and calceolaria. Beyond the terrace lay the velvety sward of the well-mown lawn, its green-

ness broken here and there by masses of brilliant color; and further still, the smooth sweep of undulating ground, by which the lawn glided almost imperceptibly into rougher park-ground, shadowed by the branches of venerable oaks and elms. An opening in the foliage, caused partly by a certain dip in the ground, had been taken advantage of and artificially enlarged, in order to afford a glimpse of the not far distant sea, and the sparkle of the blue water lent an additional charm to the soft luxuriance of vegetation that surrounded the old gray house. Without it, the vicinity of the rather overgrown park might have made the view, to many eyes, seem dull; but the magic of distance, of constant change, of a vivid freshness, was added to it by that never-to-be-forgotten "purple patch" of ocean against the horizon line.

Miss Lester looked and sighed. She would very much have liked to be mistress of such a fair demesne, but she was not sanguine about her chances of obtaining that enviable post. Sir Anthony was very courteous and attentive; she felt sure that she pleased his judgment and his taste; but she had seen no approach to a warmer emotion in his calm and critical eyes. She liked Sir Anthony very much; indeed, in her tepid way, she was really in love with him. But she cared far more for the prospect of being mistress of Kesterton Park than of becoming Anthony Kesterton's wife.

"Philip, Lady Kesterton would like you to walk across the Park with us. She wants you to carry her basket."

Miss Lester spoke in curiously cool tones. She was not very fond of this boy, young Philip Winyates, although Sir Anthony chose to make a sort of pet of him. He was the son of a very distant connection of the Kestertons, an orphan and penniless. Sir Anthony had sent him to school, and usually invited him to the Park during his holidays.

"I shall be delighted, Miss Lester. Shall I wait for Lady Kesterton at the garden-door?"

"Just keep within sight, on the terrace, please. We shall see you there when we want you." And Miss Lester closed the window.

"She always speaks to me as if I were her servant," said the boy to himself, his sensitive face flushing as he turned away. He was fourteen, tall for his age and rather delicate-looking, bright and pleasant of countenance without being exactly handsome, but with a fine, well-developed brow and beautiful brown eyes, giving promise of unusually great intelligence. It was partly on account of this intelligence that he was so great a favorite with Sir Anthony, who valued intellectual power (in his own sex) more than any other quality. But, like Sir Anthony himself, he was too fond of books to find favor in Lady Kesterton's eyes; and Miss Lester treated him with a cold hauteur which gave little promise of friendly relations between them should she ever become mistress of the Park.

The trio started forth together, however, with all the appearance of friendship and amiability. Lady Kesterton was in a good humor, and encouraged the boy to talk. Although she was not fond of him, she liked his fresh, naïve chatter better than Miss Lester's rather stilted remarks on a narrow range of subjects. They reached at last a portion of the enclosure through which there was a right of way from the village of Kesterton to the sea: it was an old privilege of the villagers at

which Sir Anthony often grumbled, but which Lady Kesterton stoutly maintained. The way to the West Lodge lay along the trodden footway; and it was in consequence of this "right of way" that a little incident occurred which none of the persons concerned were ever very likely to forget.

A withered crone, almost doubled with age, carrying on her back a bundle of seaweed, came down the path and dropped a curtsey to my lady on meeting her. Lady Kesterton put up her gold-rimmed eye-glass, and frowned majestically at the salutation, then suddenly stopped short.

"You are a stranger here," she said. "Where do you come from?"

"I comes from Noffolk way, my lady, to live wi' my darter; her that be Derrick's wife, my lady. My name, it's Nanny Moggs."

"Derrick—the lodge keeper?"

"Aye, my lady. He be main kind to me, him an' my darter too."

"Why do you carry that bundle there?" said Lady Kesterton, rather sharply. "It's too heavy for you."

"Let me carry it for her," cried Philip, hastily and heartily. "It is much too heavy—and I can carry it with the basket too."

"There's no occasion, young master," said the old woman. "It aint half so heavy as many a load I've carried during the last few years. You see, my lady, my darter didn't know how useful the seaweed could be both in the garden and for fuel, and for a bed now and then, when dried, so I brought her up a bundle or two to try it. No, sir, it aint one bit too heavy; and I

wouldn't like you to demean yerself a-touching of it. But I thank you kindly, all the same."

"I will call and see you some day," said Lady Kesterton, in a tone that was meant to be kindly but sounded rather threatening. "Come along, Philip."

For Philip had hung behind to slip a coin into the old woman's hand. She said something in reply which caused him to laugh as he ran forward.

"She offered to tell my fortune," he said, still laughing. "She says she can do it by looking at my hand."

Lady Kesterton stood still in her displeasure.

"Fortune telling! Palmistry!" she said. "Does she not know that such abominable and illegal practices are forbidden on our land?"

Philip was somewhat startled by her anger, but Miss Lester interposed with a trifle more eagerness than usual—

"Oh, dear Lady Kesterton, do let us see what she will say. I have often longed to have my fortune told. Here,"—plucking off her glove, and turning hastily to the old woman, who had been plodding along behind them—"look at my hand, and tell me what my fortune is."

"I do not approve of such heathenish proceedings," said Lady Kesterton. But she did not like to put too much restraint on the liberty of a guest, and therefore stood in the mossy path frowning impatiently, but not actually declining to listen to what the old crone said. Eva, with a half laugh, handed a shilling to the fortune-teller, and extended her slender palm.

"There's a marriage before ye," said Nanny Moggs.
"Eh, and a fine marriage, too; but not so soon as ye're

maybe thinking, my lady. Not for a few years yet. And ye'll marry a widower with children of his own, and have fine lands and houses, and be a lucky woman. But, luck changes sometimes, ye must remember; and there's a dividing of ways when ye don't think of it."

"What rubbish is she talking?" said Lady Kesterton, angrily; while Eva, surprised and disappointed, drew back her hand.

"It is just the ordinary conventional prophecy," she said, trying to disguise her real feeling. "I thought that in the country—with an unsophisticated 'country wife' one might hear something a little more out of the way."

"I did not know that you were superstitious," said Lady Kesterton, coldly.

"Tell me my fortune, too," said Philip, holding out his hand.

"Yours, my young master? Eh, your fortune's hardly written yet," said the old woman, chuckling to herself. "The babe's yet unborn that will be the girl you love, my honey. But there's good luck in store for you yet; for you're a northern lad, and you will be master of land which was once water and waste and shall be water once again."

She said the last words in an odd recitative or chant, which half awed the boy, yet made him feel inclined to laugh; but when he glanced at Lady Kesterton the mirth went out of his face at once. The old lady had grown livid, apparently with rage, and her eyes flashed lightning of wrath, first at the boy and then at Nanny Moggs.

"Take your hand away, Philip," she said. "And

you—how dare you mix yourself up with our family affairs, woman? If I hear of you telling fortunes again, or quoting our traditions, I shall have you prosecuted at once—do you hear? So take care!"

She turned and walked onward very fast toward the lodge gate, while Miss Lester and Philip followed at a somewhat less rapid pace. At the gate Lady Kesterton, still white with anger, faced them again.

"Don't let me see you in the park any more," she said to the old crone. "Go round by the cliff if you want seaweed. Never set foot within these gates again."

Then Philip, being young and unadvised, took upon himself to intercede. "Oh, Lady Kesterton," he said, "you don't mean that surely! It is such a long way by the cliff."

"What business have you to interfere?" cried she, turning upon him with flaming eyes. "What right have you to say a word as to how I deal with my son's tenants? This comes of listening to servants' talk, and trying to curry favor with my son. But you do it in my presence at your peril."

And lifting her ebony cane with a still vigorous right hand, she brought it down sharply on the shoulders of the astonished lad, who scarcely knew what he had done amiss.

CHAPTER II.

SIR ANTHONY'S CHOICE.

In another moment Lady Kesterton and Miss Lester were left alone. Old Mrs. Moggs hobbled away as fast as her fegs would carry her; and Philip rushed off through the park in a frenzy of wounded feeling and resentment. Miss Lester would very much have liked to ask the meaning of her hostess's sudden anger, but she was far too discreet to do any such thing. She simply picked up the basket of good things for the lodge-keeper's wife, which Philip had hastily thrown down, and walked by the side of Lady Kesterton, who, with quickened breath and hurrying feet, made the best of her way to the lodge.

Eva did not enter the picturesque little dwelling. Lady Kesterton's big figure, her satin skirts and silk-lined cloak always took up so much room in the cottages that it was better for any other visitor to remain away. On this occasion Lady Kesterton did not stay long. There was a look of relief and satisfaction in her face when she came out again, as if Mrs. Derrick's apologies and protestations had put her into a better temper. She talked quite pleasantly to Eva for a little time; and never suspected that Eva was seriously considering her as quite a new kind of drawback to a marriage with Sir Anthony. Just to think of such a temper! For an old lady too!—and to strike a boy

with a stick! Miss Lester was shocked, and, to tell the truth, a little frightened.

"We'll go round by the plantation," said Lady Kesterton, quite cheerfully. "Mary Derrick says that Anthony is there. It wants thinning a bit. This way, my dear."

"This way" was through a wicket-gate on the other side of the road, just opposite the lodge. Beyond it lay a rising ground, thickly dotted with fir-trees, crowded together still more visibly as they neared the top of the hill.

"Here we are at the top!" said the old lady at last, in an amiable voice. "It is a charming view, is it not? We have the sea before us, and the ground slopes away from this point toward—"

She did not finish her sentence. She was looking complacently down the hill-side when her eye lighted upon a couple—a man and woman—who were standing beside a little heathery knoll overshadowed by a great elm tree, possibly in the belief that they could not be observed. The man wore brown shooting-clothes, the girl a gay pink cotton frock and white sun-bonnet; her face was upturned to his, and his arm was round her waist. He was about to kiss her-yes, he bent his head, there and then, and kissed her on the mouth. He was a tall, good-looking man, and she was as beautiful as the day, so that, from a purely human point of view, they were a capital match for each other; but then Lady Kesterton did not regard them simply from a human point of view. For the man was her son, Sir Anthony; and the woman-well, Lady Kesterton did not know her name, but it was plain that she was a country wench of some sort—a milkmaid, or perhaps a keeper's daughter.

She seized Miss Lester's arm almost violently, and pushed her back. "Don't look! Don't look!" she cried. "We will go back." Then, repenting of her impetuosity, she added, as they retraced their steps, "Some foolish flirtation going on. Not at all a proper thing," and she looked at Eva apprehensively. Perhaps, after all, Miss Lester had not seen? And in that case Lady Kesterton was not going to tell her.

But Eva had seen, and knew—perhaps better than Lady Kesterton could have told her—how much was signified by the embrace which they had witnessed. For Sir Anthony was by nature a cold man and a fastidious one, and not given to kissing for kissing's sake. Miss Lester felt herself slightly insulted by the preference he had manifested, and planned a return home upon the morrow.

Sir Anthony did not appear at afternoon tea. He presented himself as usual five minutes before dinner-time; cool, immaculate, courteous, and refined as ever. Miss Lester caught herself looking at him with curiosity; she wondered how he could manage to be so unconcerned. And Lady Kesterton was funereal in her

solemnity.

Eva retired early to her room, and Sir Anthony went to the library. But he was not to remain undisturbed. To his very great surprise, his mother walked majestically into the room, and seated herself on a chair near his own with the air of one who wished for a conversation.

"This is an unexpected honor," said Sir Anthony. "Will you not take a more comfortable chair, mother?"

"Thank you, Anthony, I am comfortable where I am. May I trouble you to lay down your book for a moment or two? I have something to say."

Her son slightly elevated his eyebrows, and rather reluctantly obeyed, leaving a paper-cutter inside the book at the point which he had reached. Lady Kesterton glanced at the title and shuddered. It was a volume of poems just issued, remarkable, as she had read in an Evangelical review, for its beauty of diction and corruptness of sentiment. If this was the kind of book which Anthony was reading, small wonder if he wooed a fair peasant maiden in the soft September days!

He was certainly very distinguished-looking—thoroughly aristocratic, if a fine, white skin, clearly cut thin features, and peculiarly beautiful hands may be considered to betoken aristocracy of race. He had gray eyes, very soft dark hair on his head, but neither beard nor moustache. His face had nothing of the unfinished look which sometimes stamps the countenance of the uncultured. Every feature seemed to have been chiselled with extreme care. But the nose was a little too long, the eyes a trifle too close together, the nostrils a little pinched.

Lady Kesterton, however, thought him very handsome. It was the very strength of her belief in his beauty and virtues that made her voice tremble as she spoke.

- "Anthony, I am exceedingly distressed."
- "I am sorry to hear it, mother."
- "I went out with Miss Lester this afternoon about four, and we made our way to the fir-tree plantation."

Here Anthony began to look disturbed.

"When I reached the top of the hill I looked down, and—I saw—need I tell you what I saw?—my son and a—a young woman—"

Sir Anthony's complexion was of the cameo-like pal-

lor which does not often vary; but at this point it became suffused with a dull red.

"Well, mother?" he said quietly.

"Is it possible, my dear son, that you were kissing that girl!"

There was a moment's pause. The horror in Lady Kesterton's voice was not to be mistaken—nor trifled with. Sir Anthony felt that.

"I suppose I must plead guilty," he said, with a cool little laugh. "She is the prettiest girl I have ever seen, and these country lasses think little of a kiss or two. My dear mother, you need not alarm yourself. I am not going to inflict a dairy-maid upon you by way of a wife."

He spoke with an inflection of languid scorn, and his attitude was the perfection of carelessness. He looked as though he were studying the scarlet silk sock and patent leather shoe which adorned his well-shaped foot, and thinking of nothing else. But when he had surveyed them long enough he gave his mother a quick, almost a furtive, glance, which spoke of an undeviating watchfulness. Sir Anthony was largely dependent upon his mother, and rather afraid of her—two facts which he never by any chance forgot.

"I am glad to hear that there was nothing serious in it," said Lady Kesterton. "I must warn you that such practices tend to deprave the female mind and lower your own character in the neighborhood; and I must beg that such an occurrence be not repeated."

"Very well, mother. I can safely promise you that.

"And what was the name of the young woman?" said Lady Kesterton. "Upon my word," said Anthony, lazily, "I don't know."

"You do not know? And yet you adopted that very affectionate attitude toward her! I assure you that I was deeply grieved and shocked. You must know the girl's name."

"If you saw the girl, you probably know it better than I do I was merely struck by her pretty face."

"It is my impression," said Lady Kesterton, "that the girl is a stranger to the village. I did not recognize her face."

"Thank Heaven!" thought the man before her; but he only smiled and moved his fingers toward the green book upon the table. Lady Kesterton understood the hint.

"I am going now," she said, rising, "but though you have taken a load from my breast by what you have now told me, I must yet add a word, Anthony, of warning against that levity of mind and want of principle which—"

"Oh, my dear mother, you are making too much out of a trifle," said Sir Anthony, with some impatience of manner. "I assure you there was nothing in it, and I am very sorry. Will not that content you?"

It did not altogether content her, and he had to resign himself to a severely moral lecture, of which it may be conjectured that he did not hear one word in ten. When his mother had at length taken her departure, he meditated for a few moments before he reopened his book of verse. "I must tell the little mouse to keep out of the old cat's way," he said to himself, with a smile lingering upon his lips, as he once more handled the paper-cutter.

While Lady Kesterton was interviewing her son in the library, Philip Winyates was soothing his wounded feelings by a gossip with his particular friend, Mrs. Bates, the house-keeper. Mrs. Bates was a motherly woman, who petted the orphan boy and gave him more tenderness than he got from any one else. And it was to her that he confided the story of his wrongs in the park that afternoon. He did not tell old Bates that Lady Kesterton had struck him; that seemed to him an indignity too great to be put into words. But he wanted to know why she should have been so angry.

"Why, my dear," said Mrs. Bates soothingly, "Mrs. Moggs must have got hold of that queer old rhyme that's scratched on the wall of the Priest's Hole upstairs. You mind the Priest's Hole, don't you? A secret room it used to be, but there's not much secret about it nowadays. And all the country-side knows the rhyme."

"I don't know it," said Philip in an injured tone.
"Tell it me—do."

"Well, let me see! It's a sort o' prophecy, you know—not that I hold with such rubbage myself. But this is how it runs:

'Before the Northman is master
Of land which is water and waste,
Kester's lord shall see disaster;
Nor shall there be end to sorrow and pain
Till the land which was water be water again.'"

"That sounds like nonsense," said Master Philip, decisively.

"So it does, my dear. But there's more sense in it than you'd think. For the main part of the Kesterton estate, all the part near the village and up the chine, was once water and waste indeed. It's what they call reclaimed land, and it's the richest and best bit of land Sir Anthony has. Well, when that silly old woman said that you were a Northern lad, and would be master some day of land that is all waste and water, don't you see that she was foretelling disaster for Sir Anthony? It was that which made my lady so angry and put out."

"But what nonsense! Does Lady Kesterton really believe it?"

"No, of course not, my dear. But she don't like to hear evil foretold of the master—which is natural enough. And this old Mother Moggs, as some people call her, must have had a wicked, bad temper, and been an old silly, too, to have mentioned it. For it's not very likely, for one thing, Master Philip," eyeing the boy meditatively, "that you'll ever come to be master of the land down by the shore."

"Not a bit," said Philip, laughing and yawning.

"And the last thing I wish is disaster to the lord of Kesterton. So good night, Bates."

"Eh, dear," ejaculated the old woman, looking after him reflectively; "but for all I said it wasn't likely, it is a possible thing, seeing as how Sir Anthony's so fond of him. And if Sir Anthony didn't marry, after all, there's no saying how the property would go."

It did not seem as if Sir Anthony intended to marry. Miss Lester, to whom he had paid no attentions worth mentioning, left the house in a few days, and was not succeeded by any other young lady visitor. Lady Kesterton had apparently given up her attempts to procure a suitable bride for him. And before six months had passed away, she became almost an invalid from the effects of a paralytic attack. Her brain remained quite

clear, but her lower limbs were affected, and the doctors declared that she would never walk again.

After this event it was noticed that Sir Anthony became more and more of a recluse. Half the house was shut up, and several of the servants—including the worthy Mrs. Bates and the butler—were pensioned off or sent away. Sir Anthony fell into the way of inviting few guests to the house, and of accepting no invitations. It was understood that he intended to lead the life of a student and a scholar, and that he would one day publish some very remarkable book. In the mean time he shut himself up and was seldom seen outside the grounds.

But, unknown to him, Lady Kesterton's vigorous constitution was rapidly gaining the day over the disease that had assailed her. Long before her son was aware of the fact, she was able to walk about her rooms. The doctor's prognostications had always been scouted by the old lady. And a day came when Lady Kesterton felt so remarkably brisk and well that she resolved to take a walk down the long corridor outside her bedroom, and have a look at some of the old rooms upon her way. She was quite sure, she said to herself, that they were smothered in dust, and—in the absence of Sir Anthony for the day, and the temporary disappearance of her nurse—she meant to go and see.

She was so much shocked at the appearace of some of the rooms that she went farther than she had intended. And at last, pushing open a green baize door—where she remembered, by the bye, that no baize door used to be—she found herself in that portion of the house known as the West Wing, which had not been in use for many years. Now, however, it seemed to be inhabited, for

the sounds of voices and laughter reached her from one of the rooms. She was not equal to going up and down stairs, but she was strong enough to walk straight on. She went to the door from which the sounds seemed to proceed, and pushed it open. Then she stood on the threshold, angry, startled, and amazed.

For there sat a woman of remarkable beauty—the woman whom Lady Kesterton had once lectured her son for kissing—with needlework in her hand, and an indescribable air of being perfectly at home. And on the floor beside her, with the same air of intimacy and enjoyment, sat two lovely children—a girl and boy—playing with a kitten and some toys.

Lady Kesterton stood aghast.

CHAPTER III.

THE WEST WING.

"What upon earth is the meaning of this?" cried Lady Kesterton.

The woman rose and curtseyed. She also changed color and began to tremble, stepping forward a little as though to hide the children behind her skirts.

"Who are you?" her ladyship demanded, with the frown which even Sir Anthony found terrible. "What business have you here?"

"I am the housekeeper, my lady," said the girl—she looked but a girl in years—very deprecatingly.

"The housekeeper! Stuff and nonsense! If you are the housekeeper, why don't you come to me in the morning for orders? Not that I should have ever permitted you to call yourself housekeeper; under-housemaid is about your status in the house," said Lady Kesterton very grimly. "Who told you that you were 'housekeeper,' eh?"

There was a slight hesitation; then the girl looked straight into the old lady's eyes and answered.

"Sir Anthony, my lady."

This reply was so utterly unexpected by Lady Kesterton that she was obliged to sit down, for she felt as if the solid earth were collapsing beneath her feet.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Mary Paston-Mrs. Paston, my lady."

"You are married?" said the old lady severely.

The crimson rushed to the girl's brow, but she still looked Lady Kesterton straight in the face. "Yes, ma'am, I'm married. There's my ring," she said, holding out a hand which was wonderfully white and shapely for one in her rank of life. "I've been married these four years and more."

"And pray, where is your husband?"

"He is dead, my lady. He was a seafaring man, and was lost on his way to Australia."

"And are these his children?"

"Yes, my lady."

The girl's answers were unflinchingly direct, and if it had not been for her habit of blushing, and a look of distress in her clear eyes, Lady Kesterton would hardly have doubted the truth of these statements. The old lady sat and meditated, observing the woman and her children meanwhile. It was certainly the girl to whom she had suspected Anthony of making love, and a beautiful creature she was too. Not one of the family por traits in the gallery represented a lovelier woman. She was slight and supple and yet rounded, with an untutored grace of movement which was most seductive; her skin was white, with a rich glow of color in the cheeks and on the full curved lips; her eyes blue, and her hair of the true auburn tint. To Lady Kesterton's disgust, this hair was not concealed beneath a cap; it was coiled loosely at the back of her well-shaped head. Her dress, moreover, was not that of a servant; it was plain, but well-made, and of soft, fine gray cashmere, such as any lady might have worn, and the only trace of an untutored taste lay in the presence of a big red bow and a rather staring brooch, with which she had decorated

the front of her pretty frock. She wore a white apron, certainly, but so might anybody who had a baby only a few months old, ready at any moment to climb into her lap.

Lady Kesterton looked at her, frowning, twitching with anger and excitement, but not knowing precisely

what to say or do.

"Are these your children?" she said at last.

"Yes, my lady."

"Come here, child." Lady Kesterton spoke to the girl, who seemed to be about three years old, and the child, terrified by her harsh looks, hid her face in the folds of the woman's gown. "Do you hear me? Come here at once, little girl."

But the child only flapped one tiny hand at her and cried in an imperious, childish voice:

"Go 'way! go 'way!"

"You should teach your children to obey their superiors," said Lady Kesterton sharply. "Make her come to me at once!"

"Come, Elfie," said Mary Paston, stooping down and trying to detach the clinging fingers from her gown, "turn round and speak to the lady like a good girl. Turn round and don't be naughty; do what your mother tells you, and she'll give you some goodies by-and-by."

"I should not give her goodies, I should give her something else, which she seems to deserve," said Lady Kesterton grimly. "Oh, she's coming now, is she? Well, what's your name?"

The little thing stared at her out of a pair of solemn gray eyes with black lashes—where had Lady Kesterton seen such eyes before? not in poor Mary Paston's face!—

and uttered her name with precocious clearness of enunciation. "Elfrida," she said.

Lady Kesterton, who had bent forward a little, suddenly drew herself erect. "What business had you to take that name for your child?" she said. It was a well-known name among the Kestertons. It had been borne by a daughter of her own who had died very young. Mary hung her head and did not reply.

Lady Kesterton observed the children in silence for a moment. The little girl had not her mother's beauty, but she had far more than her mother's refinement and delicacy of outline. Mary's beauty, great though it was, belonged to the kind which sometimes coarsens with lapse of years; but it was difficult to imagine any coarsening process in connection with Elfrida's daintily finished features. She was dressed in a loose white frock trimmed with embroidery and fine Valenciennes lace.

The boy—a child of fifteen months old—was start-lingly like his mother. He had the same coloring, the same blue eyes and ruddy golden hair. There was no doubt as to his being Mary Paston's son. But Lady Kesterton looked most at Elfrida—whose name was scarcely appropriate to her eyes and hair.

"I am very much surprised," she said at last, in her grating tones, "that you have never reported yourself to me. I suppose you understand that I am the mistress of this house?"

With a little curtsey Mary answered, "Yes, my lady."

"And that I—no one else—not even my son—I engage the servants?"

"Yes, my lady."

[&]quot;And dismiss them, as I choose?"

"Yes, my lady."

But Mary's cheek began to pale, a quiver disturbed the curves of her rich, red mouth. She began to suspect what Lady Kesterton's next words would be.

"Very well. Then I dismiss you—do you understand? You may go, and take your children with you. Do they always live here with you, I should like to know?"

"Yes, ma'am. But, oh, my lady, we don't do no harm; don't turn us out!" said Mary Paston, beginning to cry.

She was a stupid woman, with all her beauty, and a woman without spirit; and she did herself no good by shedding tears in the presence of Lady Kesterton, who took them for a confession of guilt.

"I shall certainly turn you out—and at once. Who gave you permission to use the west wing, I should like to know? Such impertinence! Pack up your things at once, and be gone! I will give you an hour—and then the servants will have orders to turn you out of doors whether you are ready or not."

"My lady—oh, my lady! If you will but wait until Sir Anthony comes home, and hear what he has to say!" cried Mary, driven to a desperate appeal, which availed her worse than nothing. "It was the master that told me to come," she sobbed. "He said so—and I can't go—I can't, until he comes back."

Lady Kesterton's face grew absolutely pitiless. "You will go this instant," she said, "and your clothes can be sent after you. I am perfectly certain that you are not fit to remain under a respectable roof. My house and my son's house shall not be polluted any longer—"

"Oh, my lady, I must speak—I must make you under-

stand," sobbed Mary, snatching up her baby and pressing it to her bosom, as if to defend herself with that tiny morsel of humanity. "I am his wife, my lady—Sir Anthony's lawful wedded wife—and these are his children, and will bear his name."

Lady Kesterton rose to her feet, trying to utter an indignant protest; but the effort that she had already made had been too much for her. She could neither speak nor move; but she fell sideways half off her chair, and Mary, perceiving the situation, put down the baby and went to her aid.

Two days and nights elapsed before Lady Kesterton recovered consciousness. At last, on a mild summerlike May evening, she opened her eyes and found herself in her own bed, in her own room. A nurse sat beside her; a small fire crackled in the grate. It took Lady Kesterton some time to collect her scattered senses; but, as she by-and-by perceived, they had been scattered only, and not destroyed. Her memory returned; her judgment, her keen sense of what was right and wrong; her love for her son, and her ambition for his future. But with all this, she could not move a limb. She could speak a little, she presently found out-thickly and indistinctly, though so as to be understood-but she would never move of her own free-will from her bed again. She heard the nurse and the servants come and go; she saw her son's face at her bedside; yet for some hours she felt she had not the strength to ask the question which yet she would have given a great deal to have answered. But at last she stammered it forth to Anthony, when he bent to kiss the withered face.

[&]quot;Is-is she gone?"

No change came over Anthony's impassive features.

He feigned not to have understood the question, looked round for the nurse, and then drew back, giving no answer. But Lady Kesterton was quite determined, ill as she was, to have an answer.

For another four-and-twenty hours it had to be postponed. In her weak state she could not detain him. She sent the nurse away as soon as he appeared.

"Now, answer me," she said, so clearly that he could not pretend to misunderstand. "That girl—Paston—is she gone?"

Sir Anthony smiled serenely. "Poor Mary," he said. "Gone! Why should she go?"

"Is she—your wife? She told me she was your wife."

"You must have misunderstood her; she could not say so." He spoke quite carelessly, and in his usual tone.

"She was lying? She is nothing to you, then? Or is she—"

"She is nothing at all to me," he said, cutting short the question that he knew was coming next.

"Then—you will send her away? Perhaps she is gone?"

Sir Anthony made a gesture of unutterable impatience. "No, she is not gone," he said, after a moment's pause, "and I do not intend her to go. You forget that this is my house, and that I may surely have some little voice in its management. Mrs. Paston is a very useful woman in her way, and she cannot be sent away at a moment's notice. It is unfair to her to suggest it."

He moved away from the bed, uncomfortably conscious of his mother's gaze. He wished he could be

certain that he was not looking guilty. After two or three minutes' profound silence there came a whisper from the bed—a whisper indeed, but so sharply sibilant that it was perfectly distinct.

"You are telling me lies—lies—lies!" she said. Sir Anthony's pale features flushed violently, and the veins in his temples seemed to swell. He was far more excited than he had as yet thought it expedient to let his mother know. A sort of exasperation—the defiance of a man who had practised a useless deception for years—crept over him now.

"What if I am?" he said. "There are some things about which a man does not choose to tell the truth when he is questioned. I am thirty-four years of age: I can surely take my own way in my own house when I please? You have trampled on my tastes, my studies, my pastimes all my life, as you trampled on my father's—because you were rich: not because we thought you better or wiser than ourselves, but because you were rich. Now, do you understand the position? I have spoken the truth for once; how much more of it do you want?"

He was fierce, brutal in his anger; but his voice preserved the quiet, polished intonation so characteristic of his habits and of his race. He could speak words that were cruel and coarse; but it was quite impossible for a man of his breeding and culture to elevate his voice.

Lady Kesterton's face changed and quivered wofully as she listened to him. Then it grew quiet again and her eyes began to wander. "My money," she said—"oh yes, my money! Yes, I know I am rich. But the money is not tied up. I can leave it as I like. I need not leave it—to Anthony—unless I choose."

It was evident that she did not know that she spoke

aloud. Anthony moved to the foot of the bed and

regarded her with darkening brows.

"I have made my will," said the sick woman, with a weird smile, "to my son and his heirs—so much to the eldest boy, and so much for the eldest girl, and so much for the others. But none for Mary Paston's children—no, no, no! I will not have Mary Paston's children for my heirs; do you hear that, Anthony?"

"Well, mother!" said the son. The flush had faded from his face and left a somewhat gray pallor in its stead. It occurred to him that he had been lamentably imprudent. He stood and watched his mother, wondering whether she was conscious of what she said.

In a few minutes she looked at him again, and he saw, with a certain sensation of dismay, that her eyes were once more bright and steady. There was no doubt now as to her consciousness. She addressed him in quite her usual tone.

"You will be so good, Anthony, as to write to Mr. Watson, and ask him to come and see me to-morrow morning. There is that little business about the farm to be arranged, and I want to see him first."

"Very well, mother."

"Call nurse, please. I think I should like to sleep. Good night, Anthony."

Sir Anthony passed a night of indescribable discomfort. Of course, he did not write to Mr. Watson, the family solicitor. He had an uncomfortable impression that in spite of the reference to "that little business about the farm," his mother meant to alter the disposition of her property. It would be excessively annoying to find that she had left her money away from him, or saddled it with some ridiculous condition. And that

was what she seemed likely to do, if she continued in her present state of mind.

He fell into a troubled sleep at last, sitting in his great arm-chair; and was awakened from his slumbers at daybreak by the nurse, who came to tell him, with a solemn awe-stricken countenance, that her services were no longer required in the sick-room, because "my lady had passed away."

"Quite quiet like, in her sleep, without a struggle or a word," affirmed the nurse. "I never saw a lady make a more beautiful end."

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER THE FUNERAL.

Society was very much exercised on the question of Sir Anthony Kesterton's mode of life. Although poor old Lady Kesterton had remained in ignorance of much that went on in her household during her long period of invalidism, several people in the immediate vicinity knew, or fancied that they knew, a good deal. The appearance of Mrs. Paston at the house naturally excited comment; and the story that she and her family gave out concerning her marriage with a cousin during her absence from home was not universally believed. Mary had been away (in London or elsewhere) for more than two years before she re-appeared at Kesterton Park in the character of a young married woman with a little girl of two and a baby only a few weeks old. Thus she had been domiciled at the Park for more than a year before her presence was discovered by Lady Kesterton.

Sir Anthony must have silenced the tongues of the women who were about his mother's person; for they never opened their lips to her on the subject of Mary's presence in the house, although they whispered about it a good deal, between themselves. And no other member of the household came into her presence.

Then Lady Kesterton's visitors were few and far between. Her intimate friends—mostly stiff and

starched old dowagers—lived at considerable distances from her, and did not hear the gossip of the Kesterton villagers. The clergyman of the parish mentioned the matter to Sir Anthony, but received such a snub in return that he, being a timid man, never ventured to allude to it again. Besides, as he was rather a High Churchman, his ministrations were not favored by Lady Kesterton, who preferred an Evangelical curate from a distance; so he never came into confidential relations with her. All these circumstances contributed to the ignorance in which Lady Kesterton had been kept concerning the gossip of the neighborhood about Mary Paston.

And now that the old lady was dead, everybody was wondering what Sir Anthony would do next. Would he change his mode of life? Would he re-open the house, take to himself a wife, and silence the voice of scandal by bidding Mary Paston depart to her father's house? Or would he—as some of the gossips predicted —put the lodge-keeper's pretty daughter in Lady Kesterton's place, and introduce her to the county as his lawful wife? But Sir Anthony made no sign.

He knew well enough that he was watched. Mr. Watson, the solicitor, Dr. Barclay, the doctor, the Reverend Septimus Green, vicar of the parish—all of these were acutely anxious to know what his next step would be. His man-servant watched him with lynx eyes; the women in the house seemed to be always lying in wait for him; and the gardeners and the village people regarded him with exceptional interest. To Anthony Kesterton this state of things began to be intolerably irritating. If there was any line of action which the people around him would think absolutely unlikely for

him to take, he declared to himself that he would take it. To be dictated to by public opinion as he had been by his mother was not a thing to which he would submit.

Lady Kesterton's funeral was decorously stately, and for a few hours the representatives of neighboring county families and a few distant relations thronged the library and dining-room at Kesterton Park, as they had thronged the little church and the green churchyard. Young Philip Winyates was observed amongst the mourners. And Lord Beaulieu honored the ceremony with his presence, and shook Sir Anthony solemnly by the hand as he joined a sentence of condolence with a hope that the county might *now* see a little more of the master of Kesterton Park.

The will was read with due observance after the funeral, and some of those who listened to it made cynical comments in their own mind on Lady Kesterton's ignorance of facts. She had made exactly the kind of will that she had always been expected to make; very just, very generous even, but somewhat dictatorial. Her will had, of course, nothing to do with the landed estate of the Kestertons; it concerned her private fortune only, and this was settled upon her son Anthony and his children. It was evident that Anthony was never to be allowed to squander it. His eldest son was to possess the bulk of it, but a certain number of thousands were to be divided between the other children, if there were any, of the house. And her jewels-not family jewels, but her own particular ornaments-were to go to his eldest daughter.

Sir Anthony's face was as expressionless as a mask during the reading of this document, and no one could say whether he was pleased or disappointed by it. Quite possibly he was a little disappointed. He was a man who liked—quite as much as his mother had done—to have his money affairs under his own control. And now, as it was remarked (aside) by the doctor, he could never have the delight of disinheriting an undutiful son; land and money were both strictly entailed. Sir Anthony was a man who might live to regret this deprivation.

The guests departed before evening, Philip Winyates being the only one who was invited to stay the night. By this time he was a tall, handsome fellow—still slightly delicate in appearance—and had lately gone up to Oxford, where he had taken a scholarship. Sir Anthony was an Oxford man, and seemed to feel the charm of Philip's interest in his surrondings. It was only with Philip that Sir Anthony's manner thawed. He had always liked the lad, and he saw in him more and more the promise of a congenial mind. Congenial, indeed, in intellectual things alone; in ethical matters, in faith, morals, and religion, Philip and his cousin were at opposite poles.

And as for Philip, or Phil Winyates (as he was generally called), he was honestly fond of Sir Anthony, and grateful for the many advantages his elder cousin's generosity had procured for him. He took, as yet, quite a boyish view of his benefactor; had heard nothing of the scandal that was reported, and would probably have hotly desired to knock down any man who reported it. And for the very sake of that ardent, innocent, outspoken friendship and admiration, Sir Anthony liked Phil, and was ready to do a great deal for him. Before they parted at night, he made Philip promise to return

for the shooting, and gave him permission to bring a friend or two with him.

Phil went back to Oxford next day feeling more than usually warm at heart. He had not many relations in the world, and few of them had been kind to him. He lavished a good deal of honest affection on the man that he was now leaving, and pitied him for the loneliness of his home. Why did not Anthony get married and enjoy himself? he wondered.

The last thing that would have occurred to him as possible was the idea that the apparently kind, courteous, scholarly master of Kesterton Park was at that moment contemplating an act of cruelty and baseness with which Philip Winyates, in his young experience, would hardly have credited the vilest and most repulsive of men.

When Philip had gone, Anthony Kesterton spent half-an-hour in reading the *Times* and half an hour in smoking a cigar. At a quarter past eleven he came out of his library, mounted the stairs, and made his way to a certain upper room in the West Wing. It was the room in which Lady Kesterton had, to her great surprise, discovered Mary Paston and her children.

He walked straight in and stood on the hearth-rug, without offering any greeting to the startled woman, who paused and looked at him with wide eyes and parted lips as he came in. She had begun to fold up a child's pinafore, and she stood with it in her hand as if not knowing what she did.

"Send the child away," said Sir Anthony quietly. "I want to speak to you."

"Go and take care of baby-brother, dear," Mary urged gently as she bent over the child. "Take dolly

with you, and keep them both fast asleep until I come."

The child nodded, with a preternaturally wise expression on her infantile features; then she disappeared into the next room and closed the door. Mary looked timidly at Sir Anthony. She had not spoken to him for a week.

"She is a very handsome woman," said he to himself, as he confronted her. "Just ripe: on the verge of overripeness. She will lose that pretty red-and-white in a year or two; and then, what will remain? Impossible to produce her anywhere; quite impossible. I made a mistake: query, an irreparable mistake? We shall soon see."

"You can sit down," he said, still contemplating Mary coldly, and speaking in a tone of a master to one of his servants. "I wish to ask you what took place between my mother and you when she came here, three days before she died."

"I told you she'd been," said Mary, quivering like a leaf at the ice-cold tones of his voice. Her hands twisted themselves nervously in her apron, and her color came and went. She sat with her shoulders slightly raised and her head bent—the attitude of one who expects a blow: a decidedly irritating attitude to Sir Anthony. Perhaps because he knew that he was going to inflict one.

"Exactly: you told me so. But you did not tell me what passed between you."

"She asked me questions," said Mary, her face twitching.

"Questions—can you not keep your hands still when I speak to you?—what about?"

"The children-and my husband-and all that."

"And you told her about your husband on the China

Seas, I suppose?"

"I did, at first. But then she ordered me out of the house. She said I wasn't even to stay to pack my things, though I entreated of her to let me stop till you came home. But she said she wouldn't. And then I—I told her the truth."

"You did? The truth! And then-what happened?"

"She was took ill," Mary faltered. "I had to call the girls to carry her back to her room. And that was all."

"Enough, too," said Sir Anthony dryly. "Do you not see what you did? Virtually you killed my mother. But for that precious statement of yours, she might have been living yet. No doubt you wanted her out of the way, and would have done a good deal to procure that end. But you are mistaken. You will not take her place, as you possibly imagined that you would do. I have made different plans."

Mary listened to this speech in horrified silence; but when it was concluded she put her apron to her face and burst out into childish, choking tears.

"I kill my lady!" she sobbed. "Whoever heard such a tale before? Indeed I'd do my best to—to have her alive at this present moment, if you wanted her; not that she spoke kind to me—nor—"

"Have the goodness to leave off crying, and hold your tongue!" said Sir Anthony imperiously. The lines round his delicately cut mouth had hardened, his brows were dark, his face a little paler than usual. He hated "scenes," and at that moment he felt that he hated Mary too. "The fact remains," he went on piti-

lessly. "You were fool enough to say to her the one thing which she never could forgive nor forget. It struck her down like a blow—as you saw for yourself. If she had not died when she did, your action would very likely have made a beggar of me and of my children. Fortunately, she—was not able to carry out her intentions. But you were a fool, for all that; and you broke your promise—do you understand? A broken promise is a thing I always told you I would not forgive."

He looked at her cynically. She was still weeping and trying to sob out pleading, deprecating words.

"Don't be frightened," he said at last. "I'm not going to turn you out of the house; though I think you deserve it. But if you stay—are you listening?—you stay here as you are now. I will have no change. I will have no chattering fools saying that I have made an ass of myself. I will have no woman at the head of this house at all. Stay as you are—or go."

"But, Anthony—Anthony!" He made a gesture as though her use of his name displeased him; but in spite of that, she flung herself at his feet and tried to clasp his hands. "You promised me! You know you promised me! When I let my good name go, you said that it would be only till your mother died. Oh, wont you right me now?"

"Yes, I promised," said Sir Anthony sarcastically, "and why should I not break my promises like other people? You have broken yours to me. I do not choose to keep mine to you."

"For the children's sake!" she pleaded. "Just to make it all right before people! I wont be a trouble

to you: I'll never want company, nor fine dresses, nor nothing. Just to be called your wife!"

"Ah, yes, you would like to be 'my lady,' I have no doubt," he answered cruelly. The words stung her

into recoiling from him and rising to her feet.

"It's not that I care about," she said hoarsely. "It's only for them, and for my father and mother, that I care. God knows, if you do not know. And there's justice in the land. I can tell my father and everybody what you've been to me—what you are—and then—"

"And then," said Sir Anthony, "you will pack, my good girl, and the children, too. I'll turn you out, the three of you, and will never see any of you again. You would like that, would you not? And there would probably be no difficulty in finding somebody to supply your place."

She cried out at this, as if she were in bodily pain, and then sat rocking herself to and fro, her face hidden in her hands.

"I make you a fair offer," said Sir Anthony, implacably. "You can stay here, with every comfort and luxury for yourself and the children, if you will. There is no reason to spare expense now. You may have anything you like. But I will have no queening over the house, no title, no acknowledgment. You are Mrs. Paston still. You deserve it for your treachery to me. And if you commit that treachery again—if you say one word more than I authorize you to say—your chances are ended: out you go. So you may choose."

If she had been a high-minded woman, she might have chosen to go—and to be vindicated in the eyes of the world. But poor Mary was weak and loving and

afraid. So she sobbed out a declaration of her readiness to do all that Sir Anthony wished, and was comforted when he smiled upon her and kissed her with an effusion that he had not shown for many weary months. He even went into the next room with her and looked at the sleeping boy—a perfect cherub for beauty, and very much like Mary. Little Elfrida was sitting, quiet as a mouse, beside his cot, with her doll upon her lap. Emboldened by his success with Mary, Sir Anthony patted her cheek, and asked her for a kiss.

"No; I don't like you," said Miss Elfrida. "You make mammy cry."

And Sir Anthony did not blush, as he well might have done.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST MESSAGE.

SIR ANTHONY disappointed the County once again. He made no changes in his manner of living, and was more seldom seen in society than ever. Occasionally he went away—to London, it was rumored, or, more vaguely still, to "the Continent," but he was never absent for long. As a general rule, he lived immured within the walls of his study. And about a year after Lady Kesterton's death, he brought out a dainty volume of versions from the later Latin poets-very musical, very eloquent, and very lax in sentiment. This little book brought him considerable renown among scholars; and from time to time the literary world was enlightened by paragraphs in the Athenaum as to the nature of the next work on which Sir Anthony Kesterton was supposed to be engaged. But for some time he did not publish anything more. He read a great deal, and made voluminous notes on what he read, but without any particular result. He led a life which seemed of absolutely no value to anybody in the world.

But now and then he visited the West Wing, and saw the woman and children whose wrongs he had refused to right. When he was in a good-humor he caressed her, and gave bonbons to the little ones; when he was in an ill-humor, as happened more frequently, he amused himself by making her cry with his bitter speeches and frightening the children with sour looks and words. The children were terrified of him, in spite of his occasional gifts, but their mother loved him still, with the pathetic faithfulness of some women toward the man that has wronged them most.

Nearly three years had passed since Lady Kesterton's death before Mary Derrick again referred to the subject of her position in Sir Anthony's house. The reticence showed his power over her. She was afraid of provoking his wrath. But at last—one sunny October evening—the matter came up again.

Sir Anthony was sitting beside a bright little fire in Mary's "parlor," as she always called her room.

The children had escaped into the next room to play. Mary occupied a low high-backed chair opposite Sir Anthony's, and glanced at him now and then in a thoughtful, anxious way. The glances secretly annoyed him, and caused him to speak at last in an unusually cold tone.

"I am going abroad next week," he said.

Mary started. "For long?" she asked timidly.

"Certainly for the winter. Perhaps for a longer time. I am a little tired of England."

She caught her breath. "Will you—couldn't you—take me with you?" she murmured.

"Take you with me!" repeated Sir Anthony, staring at her as though he thought her a mad-woman. "What are you dreaming of? What upon earth should I take you abroad with me for?"

She was silent for a minute or two, and then he heard a slight choked sob, which angered him. He did not always dislike the sight of tears—they sometimes afforded him a malicious satisfaction—but he was not that evening in the mood to watch Mary cry.

"If you are going to weep I will go downstairs," he said coolly. "If I stay, have the goodness to look pleasant."

"It is only," she said, trying to choke back her sobs, "that if you go—for so long—I—perhaps I might not

see you again."

"What nonsense is this? May I ask where you

intend to go?"

"To Heaven, I hope," said Mary, with the greatest simplicity. Then she wiped her eyes, sighed, and sat up with her hands folded over her handkerchief in her lap. Sir Anthony narrowed his eyes until the pupils were hardly visible between the lids, and scrutinized her from head to foot. She had her back to the light, and he could not see her distinctly, but the sunset glow touched her hair and made it shine like an aureole of red fire.

"Sit down," he said peremptorily. "Yes—so, with your face more to the light. H'm! You look very well. May I ask what makes you talk so confidently of your speedy departure to—h'm!—another world?"

"I may look well," said Mary stubbornly, "but I don't feel well, and I aint well. Look at me: look at my wrists! I used to have some flesh upon me once. Look at my cheek-bones, and my neck! I'm falling away to nothing, and you say that I look well."

"You have not grown coarser and redder, as I expected you to do, certainly," answered Sir Anthony, with a pleasant air of saying something agreeable. "On the whole, you have put on a distinguished look, Mary: you would carry a velvet dress very well now, having lost your milkmaid bloom. You are handsomer than ever, my dear; be content with that."

"Content! I have been content too long," she cried.
"I may live contented all my life, and lie contented in my grave."

"Well, I trust so, when that time comes," said Sir Anthony provokingly. "We don't want you to walk, Mary, after you are dead."

"I would if I could," said Mary, now crying again, "if it was only to protect those poor children. If you'd but give me word that you wouldn't turn 'em out after I was gone—"

"Enough of this, Mary; it becomes wearisome. You are perfectly well, but a little fanciful; you shall see the doctor to-morrow. If I do go away it will be only for a few months. Make yourself easy; I'm not going to run away."

But Mary was possessed with one idea—a fixed idea, over which she brooded night and day. "If you go you wont find me here when you come back. Oh, Anthony, wont you do me justice before the world before I die?"

"You talk folly," he said coldly; and his face became suddenly hard and stern. "I shall not alter my way of life for such as you."

"I am the mother of your children," she pleaded, "They have rights in the world; and so have I. It is a very little thing I want. Just let people know that I—"

"I shall let people know nothing about you," he said. rising in a white heat of fury, "except what I choose. Once for all, I will have no more of this. If you talk rubbish of this kind, I will not come near you at all. I made my bargain with you after my mother died; stay as you are, or leave the house altogether. Do you

want to go out into the world to beg bread for yourself and your brats?"

As ill-luck would have it, one of the children came racing into the room at that moment. It was the boy—a beautiful little fellow, with his mother's golden hair and big blue eyes. Mary drew him toward her for a moment, and—poor, foolish, passionate creature!—pushed him toward Sir Anthony.

"Your own child!" she cried. "Your son and heir! Him that will be master of the house one day, when you're beneath the sod! How dare you say that I shall ever have to beg bread for him, Sir Anthony Kesterton? You are false and cruel enough, but you dare not deny your own child!"

Sir Anthony had turned white to the lips. This outburst from the usually silent and shrinking Mary enraged as well as surprised him. But he knew the way to punish her. He did not strike women; but he could strike a boy. He lifted his hand and deliberately struck the boy upon the cheek.

The little fellow was full of somewhat unruly spirit. Although the blow was a hard one he did not cry out. He squared his tiny fists and struck back again with all his might. And then Sir Anthony, unreasonably irritated by this baby defiance, took him by the shoulders and shook him violently, then cast him roughly and suddenly away—so roughly and suddenly that the child fell to the ground, striking himself against a heavy piece of furniture in its descent. Mary screamed aloud, and, her own private troubles for the moment forgotten, ran to pick him up. The little girl appeared in the doorway, her large questioning eyes fixed first upon Sir Anthony and then on her brother. And Sir

Anthony, with a feeling of disgust rather than of shame, strode sullenly out of the room.

Mary picked up the boy and caressed him. He did not seem to be much hurt, only a little stunned for a minute or two. He was sick almost immediately afterward; but his mother, being ignorant of such matters, did not know that this was in any way an important symptom. She confined her attention chiefly to the bruise on his face, and was not surprised by his crying in a fretful way for a long time before he fell asleep. His uneasiness occupied her mind for the rest of the evening, and she had scarcely time to think about Sir Anthony's wrath or the threats that he had uttered. Her little girl, however, asked a question or two which recalled them to her mind.

"Has Harry been naughty?" she said.

"Naughty? No, the precious! he's never naughty," said the fond mother, kissing and rocking the boy.

"Then why was the gentleman angry?" The child always spoke of Sir Anthony as "the gentleman." "He struck Harry, and then pushed him down."

"He was angry with me, my dear, that's what it was," said Mary mournfully. "He can turn us all out of the house if he pleases. He's the master."

"Why should he strike Harry if he's angry with you, mammy?" questioned Elfrida. But her mother began to cry, and no further answers could be obtained. Perhaps because her curiosity was unsatisfied, the scene remained in the little maiden's mind, never to be forgotten.

Sir Anthony's departure was considerably hastened by this incident. He left the house next morning without troubling himself to see Mary before he went.

Notwithstanding his sneers at her "fancifulness," Mary was certainly far from strong. She had, as she said, fallen away very greatly: her shoulders looked sharp and ridge-like, her chest had fallen in, her temples and cheeks were hollow. Her great blue eyes were bright with a strange translucence in the whites, such as we notice sometimes in fine porcelain; a patch of hot red color showed itself upon her thin cheeks. She was troubled with a cough and a shortness of breath, which made her move very slowly; and she grew so weak that she was quite unable to lift even a light weight, or to attend, as she had hitherto done, to the toilet of her children. And she had scant help from the servants of the house, of whom very few were left behind. The French cook and Lady Kesterton's maids had gone; the valet was with his master. The grim house-maid, one kitchen-maid and a boy alone remained behind, and they considered themselves injured by having to wait upon Mary Paston, who had originally been no better than themselves, and was now far worse. The little kitchen-maid, Sally, was more good-natured than Eliza, her superior; and when she found that Mary really was ill, she did not grumble at having to do a great deal which the poor woman had always done for herself before. For although Mary had been forbidden to wash and scrub and scour, she had always performed many of the lighter duties of a household for herself in those three rooms which constituted her home in Kesterton Park; and it was hard to her to leave them to anybody else to do. Besides, Henry was now almost always ailing; he, too, grew pale and thin, and seemed disinclined to move about Mary was not clever; she had no suspicion that anything was wrong with him; but she fretted restlessly, as sick people will sometimes do, for a change; and was quite convinced that if they could get away from Kesterton she and Henry would both be well.

It was to Elfrida that she moaned and complained. The little girl was of unusual intelligence. It seemed sometimes as if she possessed the tact and discernment of a woman. She soon became expert in managing her little brother: in dressing and undressing him, amusing him and putting him to sleep; and she did as much for her mother's comfort as for her brother's. After a time Mary was entirely guided and managed by her little daughter, who waited upon her night and day. Even the servants, heedless and rather hard-hearted as they were, were touched by the sight of her helpfulness and activity. "That there Elfie," Sally said, "is just like a reg'lar nurse, small as she is. I'd offer to sit up with Mrs. Paston a bit if it was any good, but thereshe nearly snapped my head off when I mentioned it, 'I can get mother anything she wants,' says she. But there aint many children of her age as would get up half-a-dozen times in the night for their mother's medicine and beef-tea She's worth her weight in gold, that little creature." And, fortified by these praises of the child, she left Elfrida with a good conscience.

The doctor came, of course, to see Mary Paston, but after a few visits from him she petulantly refused to see him. "He does me no good," she complained to Elfrida. "He only torments me. We'll go on with the medicine and the jelly and all that, my dear, but the doctor can't do me no good."

And Elfrida, wise little woman as she was, did not

know how important it might be to combat her mother's resolution.

Sir Anthony did not write to Mary. Money for her wants was furnished through Mr. Watson, who came once a month to pay into her hands a certain sum. Once or twice she summoned up courage to ask where Sir Anthony was travelling just then. Once it was in "Asia Minor," at another time "in Egypt." When he had gone, Mary made her little girl bring an atlas to her, and tried to find the names upon the map. In this search, Elfie could not help her, for though Elfie knew how to read by this time, she had not learnt any geography. And as Mary's own knowledge was scanty, she was only successful in finding "Asia" in large letters; and Asia offered a wide field for speculation to her untravelled mind.

But the progress of her malady was slow. More than eighteen months had gone by since Sir Anthony's departure when Mary realized that the time was nearly come for her to go.

"I can't get up, Elfie. I can't get up, my dear," she moaned, one soft spring day. "The heat, it do tire me so; and I can rest very well in bed. Henry's more comfortable in bed, too, I think, and he can rest here, side o' me. And you come and sit by your poor mammy, for you won't have her long."

"Oh, yes, mammy, I shall; you'll get better now that spring 's here," said the child. "Look how pretty it is in the garden!"

"Pretty—eh, it's pretty; but I shant be here long to see it. I'm going to die, Elfie."

The child burst into tears; not because she attached much meaning to the idea of dying, but because her mother looked at her with such solemn eyes, so that she felt afraid.

"Don't cry," said Mary, almost fretfully. "It does no good, and you'll make baby cry too, if you don't take care. And I've something to say to you while my cough's a bit better and I can talk."

Elfrida obediently dried her tears and listened. "I always knew that I shouldn't see him again," the dying woman murmured. "I told him so, but he wouldn't believe it. Sir Anthony, Elfie—the gentleman, you know—"

"The one that used to scold you?" inquired the child.

"You are not to say that. You are a naughty girl," said the mother irritably. "He was always good and kind; remember that. And when he comes back to Kesterton, you're to give him a message from me."

"A message?" said Elfrida. She trembled at the thought, but her mother must be obeyed.

"Yes, a message. I shall be in the churchyard by then, and there's nobody to leave a message with but you. I sent down to my mother, but she wouldn't come a-near me. And I can't leave it to the servants. And you're so young and all—oh deary dear! What shall I do?"

"I'll remember the message; I'll give it to the gentleman, mammy," said Elfrida. "Indeed I will. I wont forget."

"You're sure you wont?" said the mother eagerly. There was something pitiful in the trust which she, a grown woman, reposed in that slight, small child. "You'll think on it night and day until you've given it? You promise me that?"

"Yes, mammy, I promise."

"Well, then, it's just this," said Mary. "You're to say to him that I forgave him and wished him well, and that I hoped he'd be good to my children. That's all. Only you be sure to tell him what I said. Say it over, so that I may see you've got it right."

Elfie repeated the message two or three times, and Mary was satisfied. "Then there's Henry," the mother went on, after a little pause, chiefly occupied by coughing. "I sometimes think he's something the matter with him. His back seems to hurt him at times, and he cries such a lot. But maybe he'll grow out o' that. Elfrida, will you promise me always to take care of your brother?"

"Oh, yes, mammy. And when he's grown up he can take care of me."

"Ah, yes, when he's grown up. But he's younger than you, and not so strong. But you'll look after him, lovey? You'll not forget. "You'll take care of him if he's weakly, and look after him, just as I should do, if I was here?"

"Yes, mammy, indeed I will," cried Elfrida earnestly.

"You're a good girl, Elfie. You'll have your reward some day," said Mary faintly. "And Providence'll look after you, I have no doubt. You be a good girl and take care of Henry, bless his little heart! We'll all be together again—some day—some day—"

Her voice died away into a murmur, and for a time she seemed to slumber. Elfie sat very still, trying not to disturb her mother. But after a time a strange shiver and convulsion passed through the wasted frame upon the bed, and when the child looked again there was a different look, a gray, ghastly look, upon the well-known face. Moved by some dreadful fear—she scarcely knew of what—she ran for help. But help was of no avail. Mary Paston's soul had passed away, and her children were henceforth motherless.

CHAPTER VI.

ELFRIDA.

PHILIP WINYATES had distinguished himself at Oxford, and made many friends. He had no home of his own, but he was seldom at a loss for places in which to spend his vacations. He was a popular young fellow, and he always seemed to have plenty of money to spend; moreover, it was rumored that if Sir Anthony Kesterton did not marry he was the next heir. For these reasons he was welcome in many houses at Christmas, Easter, for later in the year when the shooting was going on; and as Sir Anthony when in England did not invite him often to Kesterton, and had now been abroad for about two years, Philip had fallen out of the habit of spending his time at the park.

Nevertheless, he knew that the place was always open to him if he chose to go to it. This had been impressed upon his mind by Sir Anthony. "You can treat it as your own home," he had said to Philip in his cool, indifferent way. "If you want to read quietly anywhere you can run down at any time. Make the servants wait on you, and send for anything you want. You are quite welcome."

As it happened, Philip had never availed himself of this permission of Sir Anthony's to use the Park as if it were his own. He had been of too sociable and lighthearted a disposition to shut himself up with his books in that gloomy old house for even a week's loneliness. But there was a fibre of melancholy in his own nature, which, although kept in abeyance for years by the healthy, vigorous life of school and college, yet would have its way when circumstances brought it to the front.

It is not necessary to enter into all the details of the time when Philip Winyates thought that his heart was broken, his life laid bare for ever, because a girl had jilted him. She was an exceedingly pretty girl, who belonged to a "smart" London set; and she was not in the least suitable to poor Phil. She never intended to marry him, and at last she told him so. But it was while he was still smarting and miserable after their separation that it occurred to him to go down to Kesterton Park and take up his abode there for a time.

He was sullen and out of sorts as he made his appearance at the great house in the mellow dusk of an August evening. He had thrown up his engagements—the visits that he had planned, the great "shoots" that he had fondly anticipated, the long walks and rides and drives with his beloved. She was going to be married to Lord Somebody—he had forgotten the name; and she had never cared for him at all. She had let him hold her hand, and even kiss her in the conservatory when the lights were low, but she had been quite ready to throw him over when a Marquis made his appearance on the scene, and her mother told her to accept him. That was what drove Philip out into "the wilds," as he mentally phrased it to himself. He was sick of the frivolity, the heartlessness, the falsity of modern lifein other words, of Beatrice Larose. He would seclude himself at Kesterton, and forget, if he could, that such a world—that such a woman—continued to exist.

He had telegraphed to say that he was coming, and he was hardly prepared, therefore, to find that the servants looked somewhat perplexed and troubled by his arrival. The front door was barred; the library closely shuttered.

"Did you not see my telegram?" he asked the housemaid, rather sharply.

"No, sir. Was it addressed to Mrs. Paston, sir, or-"

"To Mrs. Paston, the housekeeper. I was told to telegraph to her if I wanted to come down."

"Mrs. Paston died last June, sir, and I dare say your telegraph went to her people, the Derricks, in the village. There's no housekeeper now, sir—at least only me and the kitchen-maid; but we'll do our best to make you as comfortable as we can."

"Very well, I shant want much," said Philip vaguely.

This want of welcome and preparedness gave him a fresh chill. Everything went wrong in his small world, it seemed. He was almost inclined to go away and sleep at the village inn; but even the sour-visaged Eliza showed herself outraged by the idea.

"Master 'd never forgive us, sir. If you don't mind waiting a few minutes and taking things as you find 'em, I'm sure we'll do our best," she said, in so aggrieved a tone that Mr. Winyates thought it easier to yield to her persuasion than to run away.

So he made himself as comfortable as he could in the big, undusted library, and Eliza served him a hot supper in the morning-room and made ready one of the guest-chambers, where he slept the sleep of the just in spite of all his sorrows, and awoke next morning with a feeling of rest and calm to which he had been long unaccustomed. The house was very silent, and through the

open window there came only the sound of swaying branches and waking birds. He rose and spent a great part of the day out of doors, roaming over the hills and moors that stretched themselves away to the north and west, without considering very much where he was going, and making his way back to the Park only when the evening shadows began to fall. On the next day he did much the same thing; but on the third day it rained, and he felt that the library was more attractive than the dripping scene without. He read, wrote letters, smoked and meditated, until four or five in the afternoon; then, after a cup of rather smoky tea, he took to strolling about the passages. And, like Lady Kesterton, five years before, he found something for which he was not prepared.

The house seemed so empty and desolate, so given over to cobwebs and decay, that Philip shruged his shoulders with a passing thought of the luxurious country mansions where he might have been at that moment, had he chosen, and wondered whether Anthony knew how the poor old place was going to pieces. He felt half disposed to write and tell him even at the risk of bringing the much-soured Eliza into disgrace. He went into the picture-gallery and looked with languid interest at the rather shabby portrait-array of Kestertons of the olden time. There was only one picture which he liked. It represented a lady of George the Third's time, with white fichu and slightly powdered dark hair piled upon her head, but allowing a few stray curls to fall upon the whiteness of her neck. The features were of singular delicacy and finished modelling; the eyes were a pure, clear gray, with very long black lashes. The lady's name was given in a corner of the canvas; Philip stooped and read it—"Elfrida Kesterton, 1785."

"Ah, yes, I remember, the Earl's daughter, Anthony's great grandmother," Philip said to himself. "Died young, I believe. And Anthony is like her in features, especially—not expression. She was a very handsome young woman—with a temper, if I remember aright,—and came to a sad end. She has left her great-grandson several legacies—eyes and temper, to wit, and a knack of taking his own way, if all one hears be true."

He passed out of the picture gallery into a long corridor; he hardly knew where he was, for it was a long time since he had trodden this part of the house. A flight of stairs before him led to a glass door, from which, he now remembered, he could get into the garden, and, hailing the notion of a breath of fresh air he descended the stairs with considerable alacrity. On the last step but one he paused. Blinded by the sunlight, he had nearly stumbled over some one, or something, on the lowest step. He exclaimed, and then he looked again. It was a little girl.

She was evidently crying, with her elbows on her knees and her face half hidden in a wet rag of a hand-kerchief. That was probably why she had not heard his footstep on the stairs. She wore a very shabby black frock, and her short, dark hair was rough and dishevelled. Philip stopped and looked at the apparition in surprise. He supposed that the child belonged to the village—was probably some relation of the servants—and wondered what she was doing on the stairs. A piteous little sob again assailed his ear.

"What are you crying for, my child?" he asked, lean-

ing against the wall and looking at her with kindly curiosity.

She took her handkerchief away from her tear-bedabbled face, and stared at him in return with her big, long-lashed, gray eyes. He had a sudden consciousness that he had seen those eyes before—but where?

"You're Mr. Winyates, you're Sir Anthony's cousin, aren't you?" she said quickly. Her accent was very much purer than he would have expected, and her delicate, refined little face had not the aspect of a cottager's child.

"Yes," he said, "I am Sir Anthony's cousin; and who may you be?"

She looked at him gravely out of her pensive eyes.

"I'm Elfrida-Elfrida Paston," she replied.

Elfrida! The name gave him a shock. For this Elfrida, child though she was, resembled the Elfrida of the picture-gallery, line by line, feature by feature, as if she were a reproduction in miniature of the old-time Lady Kesterton. The eyes of Sir Anthony's ancestress looked at him out of the face of this unknown little being in a shabby frock who was crying on the stairs.

Then he recovered himself, and remembered certain facts that helped him out of his bewilderment. Paston: that was the name of Anthony's late housekeeper. This child must be some relation of hers. Probably her connection with the Park had caused her parents to call her after one of the Kestertons. And likenesses—they were fleeting, untrustworthy things; and gray eyes with long black lashes were not so uncommon, after all. "Well, and what are you doing here?" he asked in a friendly tone; he could not help being friendly with all children, and children generally adored him in consequence.

"I came here—to cry," said Elfrida.

"Indeed! This is a funny place to come to for that

purpose, isn't it?"

"Oh, no; I always come here to cry, when I don't want anybody to see me? It is so easy, you know. I can just slip out at the door up there"—and she pointed up the stairs—"and sit here till I've done crying. Nobody ever comes this way. And I don't like to cry up there because of Henry."

"Well, but-why don't you go home if you want to cry?"

"This is my home," she said, looking at him seriously. "We live here—Henry and me."

"Whom do you belong to, then? Who takes care of

you?"

"We don't belong to anybody. I take care of Henry; nobody takes care of me. I used to take care of mammy when—when she—was alive."

"You-were you Mrs. Paston's children?" said Philip

wonderingly.

Elfrida nodded. "But she died in the summer. And now I've got to take care of Henry all by myself." The great tears again filled her eyes and began to fall over her delicate pale cheeks.

"Are you crying, then, because you have to take care of him?" said Philip, interested and puzzled almost in spite of himself.

"Oh, no—only because—pr'aps I don't take care of him prop'ly, you know." Elfrida could not yet pronounce all her words very distinctly. "I tried to take care of mammy, but she—she—died; and I try to take care of Henry, too—but—" She retired behind her

handkerchief again, with a little sniff which went to Philip's heart.

"Why, my poor child, is Henry ill?" he asked.

"I'm 'fraid he is," sobbed Elfrida. Her little heart was evidently very full, and at the sound of his kind voice it overflowed altogether. "He wont eat his dinner, and he's always crying and wanting to lie down, and he's got quite thin and pale—"

"But why don't the servants look after him? Why do you still live here? Haven't you relations in the village?"

Elfrida dried her eyes and looked up in wonder. "Mammy's mother lives in the village," she said, "but she doesn't like us, and we don't like her. We've always lived here; we shouldn't like to live with mammy's mother."

"I suppose not," Philip thought to himself, with a vague notion of the comfortable life in the kitchen and scullery, as pets of the servants, which these children probably led. He had not yet grasped their true position in the household in the least. "Where is Henry?" he asked. "In bed?"

"No, he's in our room. Will you come and see him?" said the child, instantly brightening. And springing up, she began to mount the stairs at once. "It's up here," she said. Philip followed at once.

This room was very evidently not a servant's room. It was more like a very superior nursery, or even a lady's morning-room. The furniture was old-fashioned and covered with chintz, but still handsome and good: there were book-shelves and water-color sketches on the walls, and a rather faded Turkey carpet on the floor.

Various articles that had once belonged to poor Mary Paston were still displayed in prominent positions: there was a handsome work-basket and an album, and a few costly ornaments on the mantel-piece. Intermixed with these things were children's toys and articles of apparel.

But what chiefly interested Philip was the appearance of the child—a boy of about six years old—who was lying flat on the broad comfortable-looking couch drawn up to one of the windows. His eyes were closed, and he seemed to be asleep. His face was pale, and his brows were slightly contracted, as if from pain or illness; but in spite of its pallor it was a face of such wonderful beauty, as well as of such exceeding pathos, that Philip Winyates stood amazed. He was simply dressed in a little holland blouse, and he had a wooden horse in his tiny waxen hand.

"That's Henry," whispered Elfrida. "Don't you think he looks ill?"

"Well he doesn't look very bright, certainly," said Philip, almost forgetting, as he spoke, that she was only a child of eight years old. "You should send for the doctor."

"He's left off coming, now that mammy's gone. And Eliza says it's no use troubling about him; he's taken for death, like mammy."

"Oh, nonsense! We'll get the doctor to look at him to-morrow," said Philip, cheerfully, "and he'll soon put him to rights."

The boy opened his eyes at that moment; great blue eyes that looked too innocent and infantile to be so strangely weary, and to have such black shadows underneath them. He did not seem to be shy or afraid of

visitors; he smiled and conversed with Philip about his horse, but when Elfrida tried to induce him to move he screamed at once, and would not be pacified; and when adjured by her in a most maternal way to be good, sobbed out the words,

"I am good, only my back hurts me so!"

Philip stayed with the pair until his dinner was ready, and then took the first opportunity of questioning Eliza about them. But Eliza proved impenetrable. "She didn't know why they stayed; but Mr. Watson, the lawyer-gentleman, knew all about it. When Mrs. Paston died, he had come over and said that the children was to stay on till he heard from the master about them. She had no authority to do anything; but of course if the little boy was really ill—"

"Oh, I'll send a note to the doctor myself," said Phil, "and take the responsibility. Mrs. Paston—I don't know that I remember her; she came after Mrs. Bates, I understand. A widow, I suppose?"

The remark was hardly interrogative, and therefore Eliza was free to toss her head and withdraw from the room, feeling, as she afterward expressed it, that Mr. Winyates was really very "presumpshus" in his manner. But innocent Phil was quite unconscious of having given offence, although he afterward remembered the odd look that the woman cast at him when he spoke about the children.

There was something of the same look apparent in the face of the doctor, too, when that gentleman arrived in answer to Philip's note. "Ah, yes, the two Paston children," he said; "I thought they were all right. No? Well, I'll have a look at the boy—I've not seen him very recently."

It was fully half an hour before Dr. Barclay came down again, and then he looked disturbed. "I'm afraid this is a bad business," he began; "the poor little chap's been neglected, and it seems to have been a nasty tumble. It's his spine. I have been trying to get that little Elf—she's that by name and nature—to tell me how it was done, but she wont say. I expect she had something to do with it herself. I wonder whether you could get it out of her!"

"I? I've only seen her once."

"But she's taken a great fancy to you, all the same. You might run up, Phil, and ask the young monkey what she knows about it." And this, after a little persuasion, Philip agreed to do.

He had naturally a winning way with children; and it was no wonder that he won the little girl's confidence at last, although the set of her firm little mouth and the curve of her brows had already shown him that she had a will of her own. But when he urged upon her that her silence might possibly endanger Henry's chance of a cure, since the doctor wished to know exactly how and when the mischief had been done, her fortitude gave way.

"I'll tell you—I'll tell you—if it'll do Henry any good," she cried, "though mammy made me promise that I wouldn't tell. It was the gentleman that struck him before he went away. Sir Anthony, I mean. He was angry with mother, and so he struck baby—mammy said so. And Henry fell down and hurt himself, and he's never been well since—and I never, never will forgive Sir Anthony!"

And Elfrida ended with a burst of convulsive sobs.

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

It was close upon Christmas time when Sir Anthony came home. Philip had written him a warm, impulsive letter concerning the "waifs and strays" who had been left, at hap-hazard as it seemed, in his house; but to this epistle his cousin had not replied. The effect of it was seen, perhaps, in a visit paid by Mr. Watson and Dr. Barclay in company to little Henry, and in the installation of a respectable-looking nurse who was used to cases of this special complaint. This woman, Mrs. Terry by name, speedily constituted herself chief authority of both the children and queen of the rooms in the West Wing which had been appropriated to Mary's use. She was a motherly person, with a kind heart, and the children soon looked the better for her superintendence.

At first, however, she gave great offence to the servants. For one thing, she spoke scrupulously of the children as "Miss Elfrida" and "Master Henry"—a form of speech which Eliza particularly resented. But when she began to grumble and to recount the reasons for grumbling, Mrs. Terry cut her short.

"I've got my orders," she said, "and one of them was that I was not to listen to gossip, but to do my best for the dear children, as there was no knowing what might not happen to them some time or other." But from whom she took her orders, or what was likely to happen to the children, Mrs. Terry stoutly refused to tell.

Sir Anthony arrived in London on the twenty-second of December, and telegraphed at once to Philip, asking him if he could spend Christmas at Kesterton.

Philip telegraphed back his acceptance of the invitation, and Sir Anthony at once started for Southshire, leaving his cousin at liberty to come on the following day, or on Christmas Eve itself, as he pleased. He had a reason for not travelling down with Philip; there were two or three pieces of business he wanted to transact before Philip came.

He took the carriage that was waiting for him at the station straight on to Mr. Watson's office, and thence to Dr. Barclay's house; and at each of these places he stayed for some time. The coachman noticed that when he came out of the doctor's house there was a black upright line of anger—or sorrow, perhaps—upon his brow. His face was harder and more cynical than it used to be, and the veil of refinement and culture seemed at times to have grown very thin.

When he had been to the doctor's, he told the man to drive back to the lawyer's office; and here he had a second (but this time a short) conversation with Mr. Watson, during which the lawyer's face became even blacker than his own.

"Of course you must do as you please, Sir Anthony-"

"Of course!" ejaculated the baronet, in rather an unconciliatory tone.

"And I have no right to speak; but it is impossible for things to go on as they are—"

"Why impossible, if I choose to have it so?"

"The terms of Lady Kesterton's will, Sir Anthony-"

"Pooh! that doesn't apply. Look here, Watson: I will have no interference. The children are left in my care—I suppose you will not deny that?—and if I provide for them suitably, may I ask what business it is of yours who or what they are?"

"Certainly not, Sir Anthony," said Mr. Watson, who was a bald, rosy-cheeked man with grizzled whiskers and a rather anxious expression of countenance. "Not under present circumstances; but you must acknowledge contingencies might arise—in which—"

"You mean that I might die?" inquired Sir Anthony coolly. "My dear fellow, I have a superb constitution. And that little chap at Kesterton is a hopeless invalid—deformed—twisted spine, and all that sort of thing. It is hardly likely that there should ever be any necessity for a discussion about his origin. His life will not be a long one."

"But there is another child, Sir Anthony."

"The girl—oh, well, she is only a girl. Girls don't count for much, Watson. I shall make it all right for her, of course; but there is no hurry."

The little lawyer leaned back in his chair and put the tips of his fingers together with an air of exasperation.

"It seems to me, Sir Anthony, that your easier course would be to state the whole truth at once."

"Do you? I have other views. You will find them out in time, Watson. And at present may I ask you to recollect that you are sworn to secrecy."

As Sir Anthony rose, the lawyer rose also and bowed assent,

"I recollect that fact," he said dryly, "and I protest— I beg to protest!" "Protest as much as you like, so long as you hold your tongue," said Sir Anthony; and then with a curt farewell he passed out into the street and gave the word to his coachman for Kesterton Park.

Left alone, Mr. Watson fell into a brown study, and tapped his temples with the fingers of his left hand in a very reflective way.

"His views!" he said to himself. "Now what can

he mean by that? His views, indeed!"

Perhaps the rapping aided his mental powers, for byand-by a bright thought seemed to strike him.

"He means to marry! That's what he means to do! And he thinks this story will stand in his way. Lord! as if a respectable young woman wouldn't rather know the truth as it is than believe what half the county believes about poor Mary Derrick. But my fine gentleman doesn't think so. His pride is hurt by the poor little lad's misfortune, I suppose: especially if it is true that he himself brought it about. Well, well, I've promised to hold my tongue; but I shall break my promise if I see harm coming to the innocent and unprotected. By the way, I wonder what Austin White is doing now!" He pressed an electric bell, and turned briskly to the door when his clerk appeared. "Get the Clergy List for this year," he said, "and look me out the name of the Reverend Austin White, recently a curate in the parish of St. George's, Bloomsbury. See if he is there still, or where removed to."

In three minutes the clerk was back again, with a slip of paper on which he had written down the information required.

Mr. Watson put up his gold-rimmed eye-glasses and looked at it.

"Ah, got a living, I see," he murmured to himself as the clerk retired. "Not a big one, I see. St. Fillans-in-the-South—that's an odd name—Bishopsgate, E. C. I will make a note of that. Aye, and in case of accident—in case of accident, Sir Anthony Kesterton—somebody else shall have a note of it too."

He wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper, and inclosed the sheet in a large square envelope, which he then sealed with red wax and his own signet-ring. He then wrote a sentence upon the envelope:

"To be given, at my death, to Miss Elfrida Paston, now resident at Kesterton Park, Kesterton, Southshire."

He added the date, and put the sealed envelope carefully into a drawer of his bureau.

"That betrays nobody," he said, "and it gives her a chance; for, if I m not mistaken, she'll always be the leading spirit of those two."

Meanwhile, Sir Anthony was driving to Kesterton. There was a look of intense irritation upon his face.

"What a meddlesome old fool Watson is!" he was thinking. "Why in the world did I ever take him into my confidence?"

He reached the Park in time for dinner, but the dinner was not to his liking, and the whole place had a desolate, uncomfortable air, which caused him to mutter maledictions upon it at intervals all through the evening. Even the recollection that the new cook was coming on the morrow, as well as a staff of servants, failed to cheer him. What a fool he had been to return home at Christmas-time, of all times in the year! And to think it was a letter from that confounded young simpleton, Phil Winyates, that had brought him! And to what end? To what end?

Perhaps it was in order to find an answer to this query that, after dinner, when he had drunk his black coffee and smoked his cigarette, Sir Anthony left the library, went upstairs and sought the west wing. It was long since he had trod that corridor or peered into these rooms. One might have thought it possible that on such an occasion he would be touched by some fleeting passion of regret; but if so, he successfully controlled all manifestation of it. His eye was as untroubled, his mouth as cruelly contemptuous as ever.

In the room that had been Mary's, he found Mrs. Terry sitting at her needle. The nurse knew by instinct who her visitor was, and dropped him a respectful curt-sey even while she measured him with shrewd, far-seeing eyes. He had grown a long moustache during his absence from England, and the moustache was slightly streaked with gray: otherwise he was not much changed from the man who had refused to listen to poor Mary's entreaties and had struck poor Mary's child in that very room two years before. Mrs. Terry had never seen him, but she had no difficulty in recognizing him from a description often given to her.

He entered at once upon the matter which had brought him to Mrs. Terry's room. He wanted to know what she thought of the boy whom she had been engaged to nurse; and what did she think of his chances of recovery? a question at which Mrs. Terry shook her head.

"Of life, then?"

There, again, Mrs. Terry was doubtful. She said a few words about modes of alleviation, of comforts, and even of luxuries, that she would fain see supplied. Sir Anthony cut her short ruthlessly.

"He can have anything you think necessary or good for him. You have but to order it. It will be"—with a little shrug—"only for a time."

"It may be for a good long time, sir," said the nurse. Then, after a pause: "It's a pity the young gentleman's not as strong as Miss Elfrida; she's as healthy as posible. Would you like to see them, sir? They're asleep in this next room."

Sir Anthony nodded, and followed Mrs. Terry into the bedroom, where a little cot stood beside the nurse's larger bed. Elfrida slept in a smaller room—a sort of dressing-room beyond.

Little Henry's face was beautiful as ever, and in his sleep there was no trace of pain or fretfulness. Sir Anthony looked at him for some minutes, and was heard by the nurse to sigh—a fact which somewhat softened her judgment of the gentleman. He turned toward the sitting-room again after that long silent gaze, and the nurse, in some surprise said:

"Wont you look at Miss Elfie, sir?"

"Oh, no, not to-night," he said carelessly. "I can see her another time."

And then he turned on his heel and went downstairs, leaving Mrs. Terry even more indignant than she had been before for this neglect of the little girl. But Sir Anthony had never professed to take any interest in Elfrida.

Philip came on the twenty-fourth, and by that time the household had been to some extent reorganized, and the place was beginning to take on its old aspect. Phil remembered the Christmas decorations of his boyish days, and was glad to see a load of holly and laurel branches being carried into the hall. He began to stick the green red-berried sprays into the old blue vases and between the antlers of the stags' heads on the walls, as he had done when he was a boy; and Sir Anthony, coming out of the library as the dressing-bell rang, found him busy at the work.

"Why, Phil!" he said, in a more good-natured tone than was generally heard from him, "do you cultivate

the old superstitions still?"

"Some of them," said Phil, with a laugh. "I've always a dislike to seeing the Christmas decorations done only by the servants—I like to have a hand in it myself."

"There's the bell. Have your things been taken up

to your room? Is that parcel yours?"

"Oh, yes," said Philip, coloring a little—he knew not why. "It's a toy for the little chap upstairs—little Paston. I suppose he's here still? I thought of him as I came through London and saw the shops so full of children's things."

A singular look came into Sir Anthony's face; Philip could not tell whether it betokened sarcasm or impatience.

"Yes, the boy is here," he answered rather coldly "You had better bring it up with you now—one does not want children's toys scattered all over the house."

So, somewhat to Philip's discomfiture, he was obliged to pick up his parcel and follow in Sir Anthony's wake to the west wing, instead of reserving his gift for Christmas morning.

"Christmas Eve's just the same thing," said his host, when he uttered a deprecatory word.

Dressed and lying on his little invalid couch, the boy showed his weakness (and also the slight deformity which was beginning to make itself manifest) so much more plainly than he had done in his bed, that Sir Anthony could not repress a little start. He looked hard at the child, and did not at first notice the little girl, who was standing by. Elfrida did not put herself forward. The color had rushed into her face as soon as she saw Sir Anthony, but she seemed rather desirous of slipping out of his sight than of attracting notice.

Phil made his present, which excited great delight in Henry's mind, and then recollected, with some regret, that he had brought nothing for Elfrida.

"I forgot the little girl!" he said, with a look of compunction toward Mrs. Terry, who stood close by.

"Oh, Miss Elfie don't want nothing, sir," said the nurse cheerily. "What's given to Master Henry is given to her too. That's what we always say, isn't it, love? Besides, there's Santa Claus to come to-night, and he's sure to bring her something."

Thus appealed to, Elfie answered for herself, and brought Sir Anthony's cold eyes upon her.

"Santa Claus wont come for me any more," she said, "now mammy's dead."

There was rather an awkward little pause. Then Sir Anthony, with his eyes still fixed upon her face—a face so oddly, so strikingly, like his own—put his hand into his pocket and brought out a piece of gold.

"Take that instead of Santa Claus's gifts," he said.
"You can get yourself what you like with this.

To his surprise, the child put her hands behind her, started back a pace or two, and violently shook her head.

"Miss Elfie, dear!" expostulated the nurse.

"I dont want anything from him," said Elfrida, look-

ing darkly at Sir Anthony from under her delicate frowning brows.

"Why not from me?" asked Sir Anthony, laughing, and still tendering the coin. But his face twitched a

little as he spoke.

Mrs. Terry cast one swift glance at him, and then muttered something about seeing whether there was a light in the next room—a mere excuse for absenting herself. She had some idea of what the child was going to say, and knew that she would not be withheld from saying it. She guessed, also, that Sir Anthony would not wish a paid attendant to hear the message that Elfrida had to give.

"I'll take nothing from you but what I can't help," she said.

"And why, Miss Spitfire?"

She looked him straight in the face, with innocent accusing eyes, which, in spite of himself, made the man shudder and glance aside. He wished at that moment that he had not come—that he had not spoken to the girl—that Philip was not there. But it could not be helped. He must hear what this childish vixen had to say.

"Mammy told me to give you a message," she said, "and I've said it over every night so that I mightn't forget it. She said: 'Tell him I forgive him, and wished him well, and hoped he'd be good to my children.' Those were the very words. But although mammy might forgive you, I didn't, and I never shall."

There was a curious sensation among her hearers. Mrs. Terry, in the next room, caught her breath and said:

[&]quot;What next?"

Philip wheeled round on his heel, looking first at his cousin, then at the child, as if struck by something—something new and terrible, and unexpected.

Sir Anthony had turned white to the lips, and stood frowning, with hands clenched, as if he almost longed to strike to the earth the daring little mortal who defied him. But Philip's presence restrained him more than any other could have done.

"You monkey!" he said at last, with something like a laugh, though there was no mirth in it; "what have you got against me, I should like to know?"

"You struck Henry," said the child, with suddenly flaming eyes. "You struck him so that he fell down and hurt his back. They say he'll grow up crooked and ill, and it's all your fault. You did it—and I'll not have your presents, because I hate you and I hate them."

"You little fiend!" exclaimed Sir Anthony savagely. Then he turned abruptly away from her and called to Mrs. Terry. "You had better keep that little demon out of my sight," he said, pointing to the child with a long lean forefinger that trembled in spite of his efforts at self-control, "or some day I may be tempted to do her an injury. Remember—I don't wish to set eyes on her again. Keep her out of my way."

He threw the sovereign on the floor, where it rolled to the very feet of Elfrida, who would not condescend to look at it, much less to pick it up. Then he went out of the room and banged the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAROL-SINGERS.

Philip and Sir Anthony dined together rather uncomfortably on that Christmas Eve. They were not silent, they talked a good deal on various subjects; but a barrier seemed to have risen up between them. It existed chiefly, of course, on Phil's side. He was startled by the repetition of what Elfrida had said to him once, months before, and still more startled by the message from her mother which she had given to Sir Anthony. He had always liked and believed in his cousin; but these revelations seemed to him incompatible with the character which he had formerly ascribed to Anthony. He was puzzled, grieved, and even shocked; for he was a young fellow of pure mind and elevated tastes, and the discoveries that he had made repelled him.

Sir Anthony was much less disturbed than his guest. He had recovered, while dressing for dinner, from his passing fit of rage, and was determined to make the best of it. He talked about things in which Philip was interested: books, chiefly, and points of scholarship; and he talked in a masterly way, with ease, discrimination, and a fine, stinging wit, which could not fail to command the listener's admiration. Sir Anthony's tone, too, was admirable: cool, gentle, now and then ironical, but marked throughout by good taste and judgment. He could hardly have conciliated Philip

better, in an indirect way; but he soon saw that he was not making as much progress as he would have desired.

"I shall have to speak more plainly," he said to himself, when he adjourned with his cousin to the library.

They sat reading and smoking for some little time. At last Sir Anthony put down his paper and surveyed Philip steadily. The young man was apparently intent upon a book; but he had not turned a leaf for half an hour. His brow was bent, his head was leaning listlessly on his hand, and his elbow was supported by the library table. Sir Anthony was leaning back in a long, low, lounging chair. He looked the impersonation of repose in body and in mind.

"Phil, old fellow!" he said, in a peculiarly soft, almost a caressing, tone of voice, "I want to talk to you."

Phil started, thrust his book away, and faced his cousin with an air of such eager expectancy that Sir Anthony congratulated himself on his diplomatic skill. It would evidently not have done to let the matter slide; Phil was on the *qui vive* for an explanation.

"You have been puzzled this evening," said Sir Anthony.

"Yes, I have," Phil answered bluntly.

"I wont ask you why," his cousin said quietly, "for I know too well." And then he paused a little, looking down at the paper on his knee.

He was secretly averse to the course he had made up his mind to pursue. Very few men like deceit, although so many practise it. Then Anthony Kesterton had also been brought up in the paths of virtue, and knew that a man of honor must not tell another man a lie. What he told to a woman did not perhaps matter so much. But deliberately to deceive a man of his own standing, his own family, and for his own ends, was an ugly

thing to do.

"I know," he said, suddenly raising his head, "that I have exposed myself to a good deal of misunderstanding and malicious remark by some of my actions. To the world I do not care to explain myself. To you, Philip, I choose to vindicate my character."

"Thank you, Anthony," said Philip, very warmly.

But his cousin raised a warning hand.

"Wait," he said. "You may not be able to see matters as I see them; you may misjudge me and blame me too; for I cannot tell you more than half the story, after all. These children, Phil—they were poor Mrs. Paston's children, certainly; but I beg you to understand that they are none of mine."

There was a little pause, during which Philip made a short inarticulate sound of relief.

"She was a married woman, but her husband's name was not Paston. He was a friend of mine, who met her here at Kesterton—in the village—some years ago, and married her. He took her up to London, and they lived there until he died. But before he died the two had quarrelled. She found out that he had not been constant to her; and she vowed solemnly that neither she nor her children should ever bear his name. She insisted on taking another surname—chosen, I think, at random, and when I offered her the situation of housekeeper here—for she was quite destitute—she accepted it only on condition that she might keep that name."

"Very foolish of her," said Philip, "seeing what a slur it cast upon herself and her children."

"Exactly. I argued the case with her, but to no avail. I sent Watson to talk to her too—no use. She held to her determination, and forbade us to tell the children their true name and history until they were twenty-one."

"But surely you can use your own judgment now?"

"I gave my word, Phil—unfortunately. You heard the fiery message she sent me—she would never forgive me, and so on? It was because I betrayed her secret to old Watson, in case anything happened to me when I was abroad. For my poor friend's sake, I did not like to think that no one might ever know the children's history. But she resented it, as you heard."

"I am glad you told me that, Anthony. And there is one thing more, you know—"

"Oh, the little fellow's fall! Well, of course the child's version is all rubbish, as I need hardly say. An accidental stumble when I was playing with him—that was all. Nobody could ever have attributed a shadow of blame to me, except a woman with an extraordinarily diseased mind—such as Mary Paston. I doubt even whether that stumble did the mischief; but it is plain that she thinks it did, and that she has impressed that belief on her little daughter's mind."

Sir Anthony sighed as he spoke, as if he were the most ill-used of men.

"The child must be told to hold her tongue!" cried Philip indignantly.

"Better let the memory fade from her mind, as it will do by degrees," said Sir Anthony smoothly. "Well, then, you see, Phil—that's all of the story that I can tell you at present. My poor friend gave me a sort of charge to look after the children; and that is why I

take a certain amount of interest in them—especially as this accident, or whatever it was, took place in my own house. It is a little difficult to know what to do with them."

"School," suggested Phil.

"H'm! yes: they are rather young for school—and the boy is so delicate. I don't see why they should not stay quietly here for a little while—I look upon them as my wards, you know—they do no harm in the west wing with Terry to look after them."

The proposition was made so negligently that Philip had some difficulty in realizing what afterwards struck him as its remarkable generosity.

"Children in the house?" he said. "Wont they disturb you?"

"They must keep to their own quarters, of course. The boy is not able to make much disturbance; and the girl must be kept in order. Oh, merely a temporary arrangement, you know. We might find a home for them by-and-by."

"Had their father no relation living?"

"None who could be of use."

" And the mother's people?"

"Well, they live in the village. You know them—the Derricks. The man was once a keeper; he is lame now, and has a small pension."

"You are very liberal to your people, Anthony," said Philip, with a touch of admiration in his tone.

Sir Anthony laughed quietly.

"My dear boy, it pays best in the long run," he replied. "And now—have you acquitted me?"

"I have to beg your pardon for having for one moment—"

"Tcht! Phil, don't talk like that. It was most natural on your part—especially after what that little vixen said. But come, now, tell me a little about yourself. I am behindhand with the news. I heard something about a girl—Beatrice Larose."

"Don't speak of her," said Philip, flushing like a girl.

"Was it so bad? Poor boy! I saw her marriage in Galignani the other day. Married Beltane, did she not?"

"Yes. I was too poor for her. Too undistinguished. Life with me would be social extinction, she informed me; and she had never dreamed of such a thing."

The remembrance of his love troubles had for the moment thrown Sir Anthony s affairs into the background. Sir Anthony was glad of it; he wished them to remain there. He had a project of his own in his mind; and almost every sentence led him closer to the thing that he desired. Philip was screening his eyes with one hand; he did not see the smile that played for a moment over his cousin's keen quiet face.

"My poor Phil! But she would have dragged you down, old boy. I know the woman; ambitious, cold, worldly—hard as nails. You would never have got on."

"I should have worked as well as other men, I think, for her sake."

"Better than other men, probably, and killed yourself in the doing of it. Have you thought seriously, Phil, of what you mean to do with yourself?"

"I have thought I had better go out to Texas," said Philip, a little bitterly. "There seems no place for me in England. I have, I believe, two thousand pounds of my own; it seems to me that my best plan would be to purchase some land and farm it—"

Sir Anthony's laugh checked him.

"You are so well prepared for that kind of life, are you not? Come, don't look angry. I mean what I say. You have not the bucolic temperament: you care for men and books and modern thought—"

"I care for nothing at all just now," said Phil, shak-

ing his head.

""Ah, that is Lady Beltane's fault. But you will forget Lady Beltane in course of time. And—I do not wish to interfere with your plans—but I think I have some little right to express an interest in them."

"Every right!" said Philip warmly.

"And there is a certain career which I should like to see you follow, Phil. You are never happier than in a quiet studious way of life: you ought to give yourself up—to a certain extent—to literature. I think that is your vocation."

"Easily said. I have no excuse for giving myself up to that kind of life—I have yet not met with any conspicuous success in the literary line," Philip answered, with a smile that showed pleasure.

"It is your calling, for all that. At any rate, you might try it for a year or two. The fact is, I am saying one word for you and two for myself, Phil. I want you to come and live here with me."

Phil looked at his cousin, and reddened to the roots of his chestnut hair.

"It's very good of you, Anthony; but I could not live in idleness—"

"Who said anything about idleness?" said Sir Anthony laughing softly. "On the contrary, I want you to work tremendously hard. I am not offering you a berth where you will have nothing to do. I want some one to look after the estate. It is a land agency that

I offer you, my dear fellow, neither more nor less. The man who was here before has just left, after robbing me, I am informed, to some incredible extent. I used to give him three hundred a year and a house. I'll give you five, if you will live here with me and throw in a little secretarial work from time to time as well. It would suit me exactly, and I think it would suit you."

Philip sat silent from sheer astonishment. He had thrust his hands into his waistcoat pockets as he listened, and eyed the ground attentively. He felt that he looked rather stupid—rather obtuse—but he was too startled to seem otherwise.

"You would not be here all the year round, of course," said Sir Anthony, who watched his face somewhat eagerly. "We should spend some time in London every year. I should not at all care for you to be tied to the estate. If I went into Parliament—"

Philip looked up quickly.

"But I don't think I shall do that," his cousin went on. "You are a more likely man for that than I am, Phil."

"It's awfully good of you," said Phil, finding his tongue at last, "and I don't know how to thank you. It sounds splendid; but I see some objections. Suppose, for instance, you married. Your wife would not want me in the house."

"There is the house Jenkins had. That is hardly an objection. Besides, my wife—if ever I have a wife—must not object to my friends. I don't make it a condition that you shall live with me, you know. I only say that for the present—I should like it."

Thus skilfully, and not too rapidly, did he dispose of Philip's objections one by one, until at last they were all vanished, and the young man declared himself only too well satisfied with the prospect of a quiet, hardworking life at Kesterton. He knew well enough that the chance offered to him was one which many a man would grasp at; and the only thought that really ruffled his spirit was the fancy that he might be throwing up the game of life, abandoning the struggle, settling down to ease and inactivity too early in the day.

Meanwhile, Sir Anthony watched him stealthily, and smiled a little as he watched.

"We shall do well now," he said, thinking of the neglected estates, of his own much neglected business affairs, and of the comfort that it would be to have Philip always at hand. "Once here, he will never go away—unless I send him. He is bound to me for life."

In the silence that had succeeded the long discussion, there came to the ears of the two men the sound of music. The carol-singers were going their rounds, and had evidently heard that Sir Anthony was at home. From the terrace outside their voices—sweetened by distance—rose and fell in musical cadence upon the frosty air.

"Intolerable nuisance!" said Sir Anthony at last in an undertone; and then he rang the bell.

"If you send them away," said Philip, "you'll offend Kesterton village for ever and ever."

"I shall not send them away—in your sense of the words," replied the master of the house, with a little smile. "Stevens, take the singers into the hall—or kitchen—and give them some hot wine and some supper; and here's my Christmas contribution." He held out a couple of sovereigns. "I think they had better not sing any longer, it is getting late. There, Philip!" as

the door closed on the man, "I hope you give me credit, at least, for diplomacy!"

"I do indeed," said Phil—little knowing how much of it had been expended upon himself that evening.

They fell into another long silence after this, and Philip listened dreamily to the dying away of the carol-singing, and the tramp of the singers through the hall. He rather liked the carols himself, and was sorry that they had been cut short.

A knock at the library door sounded quite ghostly in the stillness, and the apparition that followed it was perhaps more startling still. It was the figure of a small girl—Elfrida Paston, to wit—with her dark hair in glorious confusion, and one hand holding up the long white nightdress a little way, so that the bare feet might not trip in its snowy folds.

Sir Anthony's brow darkened. He muttered something to himself, and his limbs seemed to turn rigid as he lay back in his chair; but he did not speak aloud. Philip sprang to his feet, almost as if the child needed protection—or restraint. Was it possible that she was walking in her sleep?

She did not look at him, or heed his exclamation of dismay. She walked straight up to Sir Anthony, stumbling a little over her night-gown as she walked, and holding out to him something that she had hitherto held tucked within her hand.

"Here," she said, showing him the sovereign which he had offered to her, "I have brought you this. Not to give it back, though; only to show it you." The fearlessness of the clear little voice struck even Philip as amazing. "Terry's been talking to me. And she says it's Christmas Eve, and the angel will bring peace

and good-will down to everybody but me, if I'm so naughty; and I went to bed and didn't listen to her or say my prayers or anything, and in the middle of the night I woke up and heard the angels bringing peace and good-will, and so I've come to tell you that I am sorry for having been naughty to you, and that I wish you a merry Christmas, after all."

"What rigmarole is this?" said Sir Anthony.

"She heard the carol-singers," said Philip in a low tone. He was more moved by the incident than Sir Anthony.

"So I brought back your gold piece," said Elfrida, "to tell you that I'll keep it if you like; but I wont spend it; I'll have a hole made through it and wear it on a ribbon inside my dress, so that I may always remember how naughty I was. Because Terry says you are not unkind, but very good, and that Henry and I are to be very good to you too. May I keep the gold piece?"

"Oh, yes, keep it," said Sir Anthony; "but you had better spend it for yourself and Henry. And how did you manage to get down here? Philip—"

"I'll carry her back," said Phil. "Come along, little woman!"

His voice was very soft and kind as he spoke to her. "Yes, I'll come," said Elfrida. "But—he—" she pointed to Sir Anthony, "he hasn't said good night and wished me a merry Christmas yet!"

Phil looked at his cousin. And it was perhaps owing to this look that Sir Anthony rose into a sitting position, and allowed himself to be kissed.

"Good night, then," he said. "Oh, yes, I wish you a merry Christmas, of course. Remember, Elfrida,

you are not to do this sort of thing again. Stay in your own rooms another night."

"He wasn't very nice, was he?" Elfrida confided to Philip as he carried the light little white-robed figure up the stairs. "But I'm glad I wished him a merry Christmas, or else the angels would have been angry with me; and to-morrow's Christmas-Day."

But she left very little "peace and goodwill" in the heart of the solitary man in the library downstairs.

CHAPTER IX.

L'ADY BELTANE'S COUSIN.

LORD BELTANE was a very wealthy peer. He had a castle and moors in Scotland, large estates and a country-house in Yorkshire, and a fine town-house in London. His rent-roll was close on forty thousand pounds a year, and it was reported that he was growing richer month by month, for coal had been discovered on his Yorkshire estate, and he was the proprietor of certain oil-springs in America. If anybody could afford to marry a portionless damsel, it was he; and, accordingly, he took to wife Miss Beatrice Larose, who had a very handsome face and not a penny to her fortune, and who had distinguished herself among her friends by a very pronounced flirtation with an equally penniless young man called Philip Winyates. Some of Miss Larose's friends had even prophesied that the two would elope; but Beatrice's indisputable good sense came to her aid, and she ended by throwing poor Phil over and accepting Lord Beltane. And the marriage was a complete success—at any rate, from an outsider's point of view.

"I do not see what more you want," said Lady Beltane's cousin to her one day when the matter was under discussion.

"Of course you don't!" cried Beatrice petulantly. "We are as different—you and I—as dark from light,

as fire from ice, as the hot south from the chilly north!" And from her disdainful lips, and the quick glance of her haughty eyes, it was easy to conjecture which of the similes she applied to herself and which to her cousin, the Honorable Eva Lester.

Miss Lester still. In spite of the wiles of Lady Kesterton and other matrons on her behalf, in spite of her own most carefully calculated and ladylike schemes to attract a really eligible suitor, there seemed small likelihood that she would ever be asked to change her name and state.

She had altered very little since the days of her visit to Kesterton Park, and although she was now nearly eight-and-thirty, she looked a comparatively young woman. Lady Kesterton was right in prognosticating that she would become handsomer as she grew older. She was still cold-looking and somewhat colorless; but no one could deny her the qualities of refinement and a stately kind of elegance. She was, indeed, a contrast to her cousin Beatrice, who at two and-twenty was in full flush of loveliness and vivacity, and loved to accentuate the intensity of her exquisite coloring by every possible device of dress and ornament. She knew the power of her beauty; she gloried in it, and it was perhaps for this reason more than for any other that she was disliked by Eva Lester. But Miss Lester was wise; it suited her to stay at Lady Beltane's house in town sometimes, and even Beatrice herself did not suspect that Eva detested her almost as much as she detested Eva Lester.

"Nevertheless," said Miss Lester, after that little outburst from Lady Beltane, "I have sufficient imagination, perhaps, to put myself into your place, and to think that there is not much wanting even to your desires."

"That shows how little you know?" cried Beatrice, irritably. "I have all that the vulgar herd desires, no doubt; houses, riches, gowns, ponies, jewels, and a redhaired middle-aged husband with a good temper; and yet you do not see how insufferably dull I am! There would have been more excitement in my life if I had run away with poor Philip Winyates than there is now."

"More excitement," said Eva dryly, "with Philip Winyates?"

There was infinite contempt in the tone.

"Phil Winyates," said Lady Beltane hotly, "was the only man I ever loved. I married to please mamma; and even, a little bit, Eva, to please you, I believe; and I am bored—bored to death, as the consequence."

"I am sorry for you," answered Miss Lester civilly, "and all the more so as your trouble is of your own making. If you had actually wished to marry Philip Winyates—odious young man as he is—nobody would have prevented you. I am sure I don't know what you would have lived on; perhaps you would have died, which would have been more exciting still, no doubt."

"Lived? We should have lived on bread and cheese and kisses, of course," said Lady Beltane carelessly. She was leaning back in an easy-chair, her dark-blue tea-gown making a bewitching contrast to her long white hands and golden hair; her slender foot in its bronze shoe and embroidered stocking thrust negligently forward upon a satin cushion. As she spoke she raised her arms, from which the loose velvet sleeves fell away, displaying the finely turned wrists to great advantage as she crossed her hands behind her shining,

graceful head. "Tell me what you would have done, Eva," she said, with a slight trace of malice in her lazy tones, "if you had married a poor man—but then you never would, would you? even if you had had the chance!"

The color rose in Miss Lester's placid face.

"You know very well that I have had several chances, as you call them, Beatrice; but I did not see my way. Of course, I could not accept a man whom I did not respect—and love."

"And, of course, you could not respect—or love—a man who had not a great many thousands a year; that goes without saying. How did you manage to let Sir Anthony Kesterton slip through your fingers ten years ago? Oh yes, I know all about it, although I was only a chit in the schoolroom at the time."

"Ten years ago? I did not know Sir Anthony Kesterton ten years ago, my dear Beatrice," said Miss Lester loftily. "You exaggerate in the most extraordinary way."

"You are mistaken," persisted Beatrice resolutely; "you knew him very well. The lapse of time evidently is unnoted by you, Eva, my dear. You were staying at Kesterton Park before old Lady Kesterton was taken ill; why, it must be more than twelve years ago, not ten, for it is only nine since the poor old lady died."

"You seem to be very well acquainted with the dates—"

"You forget," said Lady Beltane, with a gay little laugh, "that my beau Philippe was at Kesterton Park when you were there. He used often to tell me about those happy days."

Miss Lester was not easily discomposed; but something in her cousin's tone struck her as unbearably insulting, and she half rose as if to leave the room. But Beatrice's laughter rang out once more, this time with a less mocking ring.

"My dear, I was only in joke; don't take offence about nothing. Sit down, and I'll tell you a piece of news.

Sir Anthony is in town."

"Yes?" said Miss Lester, in a tone meant to imply that the news was of no interest to her at all.

"Yes," said Lady Beltane, mimicking her with considerable success. "Yes, indeed. And report says, by all that's wonderful, that Sir Anthony desires a wife."

"I dare say he will easily find one," said Eva, who seated herself again and was putting stitches very sowly into an elaborate piece of needlework. "There are plenty of pretty girls about just now, and this is the height of the season."

"That's true. But Sir Anthony does not look to me like a man who wants merely a pretty girl. I met him last night at the Haldanes'. You have hardly got the kernel of my news yet, Eva. He was asking after you very pointedly."

Eva said nothing, but she flushed slightly.

"I forgot to tell you before," said Lady Beltane, with her usual insouciance of manner. "He said that he should like to call, and I told him you would be pleased to see him. Was that right?"

"Perfectly; I shall be pleased to see Sir Anthony again."

"How gravely that is said! Eva, if I were you I wouldn't be prejudiced, you know, by the gossip of the town about him. A man is none the worse for having been a little wild in his youth—at least, so Beltane says, and he ought to know! And, of course, it would be worth your while—Kesterton Park isn't half a bad place, I believe."

"I do not think it is worth while to discuss a thing which is so extremely unlikely to happen," said Miss Lester, with great primness of manner.

"I should hope you would at least acknowledge that it is worth your while to make a good match!" cried Beatrice indignantly.

"I know that my family would be glad to see me do so," replied Eva, not lifting her eyes from her work.

"I am sure we are always delighted to see you here, Eva, and you know you are wonderfully young-looking—for your age; but we must not forget that Betty is coming on, and by the time she is out—"

"Betty! Betty is not in her teens yet," said the exasperated Miss Lester; but Lady Beltane considered discretion to be the better part of valor by this time, and made her escape from the room with a little titter of laughter.

Left alone, Eva at once put down her work and rested her head against the back of her chair. Beatrice's words had stabbed her in the most sensitive part of her nature—in the pride which she had nourished in secret until it had attained a gigantic growth. She had little to be proud of. She was the only daughter of an impoverished baron with tarnished reputation, who had left her exactly one hundred and twenty pounds a year for all her fortune. On this small allowance, Eva had to dress, travel, and visit. She had no fixed home, being always "passed" from one friend or relation to another, at whose houses she did her best to make her-

self agreeable and useful. But she was not so successful as she could have wished. And of late there had not been signs wanting to show that her friends were growing tired of her. She was bitterly tired of the life she led—tired of always seeming gracious and pleased, and at everybody's beck and call.

And there was a younger generation growing up—a generation of pretty girls—daughters, nieces, cousins—who "could not see why that Eva Lester should always be invited to make one of their house party." And here was Beatrice—Beatrice, whose marriage she had helped to bring about, and with whom she had hoped to find a constant home—Beatrice taunting her with her age and flinging Lord Beltane's young sister, Betty Stormont, in her face, so to speak. Eva felt it to be very hard. Marry? She would marry the first person laying claim to eligible qualities that would ask her; but the worst was that nobody did ask her.

It was a very pretty and luxurious drawing-room looking out on the Park, in which she sat; and as she meditated, her eye ran over its appointments with a smile of satirical wonder at Beatrice's discontent. If she had half as good fortune as Beatrice, she said to herself, would she not be content? And then there flashed across her mind the remembrance of a scene in Kesterton Park which she had not thought of for years, a scene in which an old woman, bent and wrinkled, took for a minute or two the chief part. Eva seemed to hear her muttering her queer prediction: "a widower"—"the two ways"—the word of warning at the close. She shook her head impatiently at the remembrance.

A visitor was announced even while she sat thinking these mournful thoughts, and, in spite of her usual selfpossession, Miss Lester felt herself color at the name "Sir Anthony Kesterton." Had he come to see her, or Lady Beltane? she wondered. She had not cause to wonder very long. He gave her to understand, clearly and unmistakably, that he had come to see her.

She gave him some tea, talked to him of passing events, and thought to herself how distinguished looking he had grown. He was spare, even to leanness, as he has always been, pale, grave, almost melancholy, and with a manner as near perfection in its rather frigid courtesy as it could be. His long moustache was growing a little gray, and there was a touch of silver at his temples, but these marks of age rather improved him than otherwise. His dress was as irreproachable as his manners.

She pleased him almost as much as he pleased her. She corresponded exactly to his idea of what a woman in middle life ought to be. He had, of course, no illusions about her age. If he married, he did not want to marry a young woman; he would almost have preferred in his bride a few years more than Eva had actually attained. But she was thirty-eight, a very suitable age. He was not going to lose time when once he had made up his mind. On their third meeting he asked Miss Lester to marry him, and she gave her consent.

"I have been too long a recluse," he said to her, with the most fascinating of smiles. "I want you to reclaim me from my savage life. We will make the desert of Kesterton blossom like the rose, will we not?"

"It will be very charming" said Eva. Then, after a moment's hesitation, "Do you mean to entertain?"

"We will entertain all the county if you wish. Yes, I want a little more life—a little more society. I feel

that existence is capable of more than I have got from it. I should like to try—in moderation—a new way."

Eva was mindful of the words "in moderation," when she began to discuss plans for the future with him. But she soon found that he was inclined to be generous, though not lavish. He made her some costly presents, and encouraged her to lead him about to places where art-furniture, decorations, upholstery of all kinds, could be seen. He agreed to refurnish a great part of the old house at Kesterton, and postponed definite orders only because he suggested that they could be given more easily after the marriage, when she had seen the house again, than before it.

"It is a perfectly charming arrangement," said Lady Beltane to her cousin one day. She had become very affectionate to Miss Lester now, and posed as her dearest and most intimate friend. "And of course I shall be one of your first guests, eh, Eva? I do so want to see that dear old Kesterton Park of which I have heard so much."

Eva was to be married from the Beltanes' town house, so she had no hesitation in replying.

"Of course, I shall ask you first, dear Beatrice. But for a few months the house will be rather in disorder; it must want a great deal doing to it. Fancy! nothing has been done since the time of Anthony's father; and I remember that in Lady Kesterton's days the things were all fearfully old-fashioned."

Lady Beltane did not seem to be listening. She was thinking of something else. "Is Philip there still?" she asked abruptly.

[&]quot;Yes, I believe so."

"You believe: surely you know?"

"Well, yes, he is there for the present; but I think he will leave the house when we return. There is a place where the agent has always lived before; and he might as well go to it."

Lady Beltane lifted her eyebrows.

"Is that the tone you are going to take?" she asked significantly.

"I hardly know what you mean, Beatrice. I certainly wish to have the house to myself—to Anthony and myself, of course. It is always unpleasant to have the constant presence of a third person."

"I thought Phil was a fixture, like the cornices and the curtain-poles in a new house," said Beatrice lazily, "and that you had to take him—at a valuation."

"Don't be silly, Beatrice."

"Silly, my dear? I thought that was a very practical illustration. And what will Sir Anthony do without his secretary? For I hear that Philip did a good deal of that sort of work, as well."

"You seem well informed upon the subject," said Eva. looking displeased.

"I am as well informed as I care to be. Poor Phil was the only man I ever—loved, shall we say? I have always liked to hear about his doings. Eva, do you know everything about that household? Are you sure it is all plain sailing?"

"I am like you: I know all that I wish to know," said Miss Lester, raising her head rather higher than usual. "Pray don't try to enlighten me: I am a good deal older than you, Beatrice, and I do know something of the world, although you are a married woman and I am not. I quite understand the story that the world

has had in its mouth for the last ten years, and I want to hear no more about it."

"But do you think you will get what you want?" inquired Beatrice, in her idlest manner. "It will be awkward, you know, if—after the wedding—there are things for which you are not prepared."

"There can be nothing, and I do not wish to hear any more about it," said Eva; and she sailed out of the room with a stateliness which equalled that of any Lady Kesterton of the past, and promised well for her future as the *grande dame* of a country neighborhood.

"Does she know, or does she not know?" Lady Beltane soliloquized. "At any rate, it is useless to force information on her that she doesn't want. Let her wait till she gets to Kesterton Park, and see what she finds there. I cannot help thinking that there is something—something—she does not know."

CHAPTER X.

MY WARDS.

"I TELL you," said a fresh, clear young voice, "that she shall not come in here; it is our room and she shall not come in."

"But Miss Elfie, my dear, she's mistress of the whole place: she must go wherever she pleases."

"No such thing, Terry! Sir Anthony gave us these rooms for our very own, and I have a right to keep any one out. Don't you remember when Eliza wanted to make them a short cut between the picture-gallery and the garden door, and I complained? He said then that I might keep out visitors or servants just as I pleased, and he had that bolt put on the door. I don't pretend to like Sir Anthony"—with a raised head and gleaming eye—"but now and then he can be very reasonable."

Terry shook her head dubiously. "You'll find you are going too far, Miss Elfie. My lady's mistress of the whole house, and maybe Sir Anthony too. You'd better try to be friends with her."

"Not if she comes in and wants to make a show of my poor dear boy—as if he were a wild animal to be stared at, as some people think!" And overborne by the sense of her brother's wrongs, the impetuous Elfrida suddenly burst out crying, while Terry vainly tried to check her tears.

"You great duffer!" came a boy's voice from another

room. "I hear you crying; Terry needn't say 'hush!' on my account. And who has ever made a show of me, I should like to know? Come in here and tell me about it."

Elfrida followed the imperious voice. She had been standing in the bedroom with Terry, but at Henry's call she walked slowly into the parlor, as the children had named it, and stood by the boy's couch.

She was a tall, slim girl of thirteen now, with a mass of curling dark hair which fell over her shoulders in wild but picturesque confusion. Her face-pale, small, and thin-was at present all the more unremarkable because its features were so regular and so delicately cut, but the pair of eyes which looked out from it were of rare beauty for color, form, and expression. But if she were not very likely to attract admiration, so much could hardly be said of her brother Henry's face, for worn and sharpened as it was by years of suffering, it was still singularly beautiful, and his blue eyes and golden hair were as lovely in color as they had been when he was three years old. Nearly two years younger than Elfrida, he was older than his sister in intellect and judgment; it was he who already laughed her out of her fits of rage, reasoned with her when she was violently prejudiced, was seriously grieved when she was positively naughty.

The case just now was serious. For more than three months Elfrida had been sorely distressed by the incursions of workmen on the precincts of the park. Masons, whitewashers, paper-hangers, upholsterers, had come and gone in fine confusion, and the whole house had been turned upside down. When the girl made an occasional expedition into the main part of the house,

she found chaos first and an alarming novelty afterward. A great portion of the furniture was removed; new hangings on the walls and new decorations altered the whole aspect of the rooms where she had wandered surreptitiously, with awe and reverence since the days of her babyhood. For it had been an understood thing that she was not to show herself in those parts of the house frequented by Sir Anthony and his friends; the baize door at the end of the corridor leading out of the picture-gallery shut the two children into their own domain and away from the body of the mansion. Another room had lately been put into requisition for Elfrida's sole use, and Terry slept in the ante-room opening out of Henry's apartment. Terry had grown into an institution; she was guide, confidante, and friend. The children would have been desolate indeed without her. Not that their part of the house was particularly quiet: the kitchen and the servants' rooms were in the west wing, although at a lower level; but the sound of their voices, and occasionally-to Elfrida's great disgust-certain odors now and then ascended to prove the near neighborhood of serving-men and maids. She had a somewhat haughty dislike for the household domestics, and, as she did not conceal it, she was little of a favorite with them. To even a gentler soul their alternate patronage and servility would have been trying. For the children's position remained undetermined; and the servants behaved to them as their natures dictated, or as they thought after-circumstances would justify them in doing; the consequence being that obsequiousness from one would be followed by rudeness from another, both varied at times by absolute neglect.

Elfrida was not of a placid disposition, and these changes of manner and treatment were not calculated to soothe her nerves. She was subject to fits of passionate wrath and indignation, and was capable, at such times, of acting in a headlong, hasty manner, which involved herself in considerable perplexity and trouble. And it was in one of these "tempers," as the servants contemptuously styled them, that she had once turned Eliza out of the room and appealed to the master of the house to prevent her and her brother's room from being used as a sort of thoroughfare. To go through them saved the housemaids a long détour, as they had very soon discovered; and they would have availed themselves of it to a considerable extent but for Sir Anthony's intervention. Sir Anthony had, for once, supported Elfrida, and declared that she was mistress of those four rooms in the west wing, and might do with them what she pleased. It was rather a rash authorization to give, for Elfrida gloried in it, and took advantage of it in ways in which he did not expect. And, therefore, it was that she had said of the new Lady Kesterton-"she shall not come in!"

Sir Anthony had been married early in July, and had taken his bride forthwith to Switzerland, and thence, at a later date, to Scotland. They had called, for a few hours only, at Kesterton Park on their way; just long enough to enable Lady Kesterton to make up her mind as to the colors she wanted for the drawing-rooms, her boudoir, and her own apartments, but not long enough to go through the whole house. Elfrida, as usual when strangers were in the house, had been kept strictly within the bounds of the west wing, by Mrs. Terry;

and she had not yet seen Lady Kesterton, whom she vaguely detested without quite knowing why.

Perhaps her dislike arose from a few words of Terry's, murmured when the old woman thought that one of her charges were asleep. Henry was Terry's pet and darling; and it was while she leaned over his bed one night that a few tears fell on his forehead, and she muttered to herself words that the boy—not sleeping, after all—heard and repeated to his sister. "Ah, poor lambs, it's not long you'll be here." Mrs. Terry had mourned to herself. "The new mistress will turn you out fast enough! And what you'll do then, my dears, Heaven only knows."

It was enough to impress the minds of two children with a sense of something vaguely terrible consequent on the arrival of Lady Kesterton. And with Elfrida there was also an instinct, almost maternal, to save and protect her invalid brother.

When Henry called to her she went slowly into the parlor, and, still sobbing, seated herself on a footstool beside him. He was lying on a couch which had the advantage of possessing every possible mechanical contrivance for his comfort. There were screws by which it could be raised or lowered, a book-rest, appliances for candles, writing materials and a writing-table.

"I don't see what you are making such a fuss about," said the boy, with his usual good sense. "The workmen were very jolly. There was one chap who painted the window frames—he used always to look in and nod and ask how I was. And he brought me the lame blackbird in a cage, you know."

"I know; but that's different," said Elfrida, with a feminine want of logic. "She will only come to peer

and pry, and perhaps she'll want to turn us out. Where should we go if she did? To the workhouse?"

"Oh, no, Sir Anthony would not let us go there! Didn't somebody say we had relations in the village? Perhaps we should go and live with them."

Elfrida turned her eyes of flame on him. "Do you mean the Derricks? Do you mean that you could live there—in a cottage? I should not mind for myself, but you—you!—"

She was unable to go on.

"I don't think I should mind," said Henry placidly. "But, at any rate, there's Philip; he'd never desert us."

"But Philip isn't rich: he hasn't a house," said Elfrida, sobbing.

"He'll have one some day. If Lady Kesterton turns us out I dare say she'll turn him out too," said Henry, with a sort of comfortable assurance of companionship in disaster.

Elfrida caught at his hand, and sat beside him trembling a little, but subdued, and gradually becoming calm. It was rather sad to see the two children—waifs as they already felt they were—sitting hand in hand, waiting for the word of command that might come at any moment to sever their moorings from all that had ever seemed secure, and cast them adrift upon the ocean of a troublesome life.

As they sat silent, voices and footsteps were heard outside the door. The handle was turned—turned again and again. Then came a voice they knew. "What's the matter with the door?" And then a quick, peremptory knock. "Terry, are you there?"

Elfrida sprang to her feet and listened, her eyes

dilating, her cheeks flushing in a curious way; but she did not go to the door.

"Why can't he open it?" said Henry, who had recognized Sir Anthony's voice. "Elfie, open it, quickly—do."

"I bolted it," said Elfrida, almost inaudibly. Then, while the door handle was shaken somewhat roughly, she added, more to herself than to Henry, "He said I might keep people out."

"Oh, Elfie, open the door!" cried Henry. "It's Sir Anthony, and you know you ought to do what he tells you. Where's Terry? Why doesn't she come?"

"She went out by the other door. I hope they wont think of that; I can't lock that door," said Elfrida.

Meantime the knocks and the rattling of the handle were renewed. "Elfrida, are you there? Open the door if you are." But Elfrida kept a triumphant silence, and Henry's feeble answer to the call could not be heard. Presently the noise ceased, and Sir Anthony's voice—more vexed and less indolent than usual—was heard to say, "No one is there, perhaps. The door must have been bolted and forgotten. Another time—" His accents died away with the sound of retreating footsteps, and Elfrida, snapping her fingers with delight, began a noiseless ecstatic dance of triumph round the room.

"What is the use?" said Henry. "They will only come another time, and be angry with us if they know. And Sir Anthony has been very kind; you have no business to hate him so much."

"It doesn't matter whether I hate him or not," averred Elfrida. "He does not care."

She stopped suddenly in her frolic, and listened

intently. "Oh," she cried, with a sudden gloom overshadowing her countenance, "they are coming the other way!"

And as she spoke the sound of voices and footsteps was once more heard, accompanied by the rustling of silk-lined skirts, which betokened a lady's approach. Elfrida turned crimson and held her breath. Henry looked toward the bedroom door with gentle interest.

"Oh!—and who have we here?" said a lady's voice—a smooth, low voice, which was not pleasant to the children's ears. "A boy—and a girl?"

She stepped forward into the parlor, her eyeglass raised, her draperies rustling behind her. Sir Anthony followed, stepping this way and that, to avoid treading on his wife's Paris gown. He had a rather odd expression upon his face—a quizzical look, half embarrassed and half amused. He and his wife had returned from Scotland the night before, and this was her first thorough survey of the house.

She was beautifully dressed, and looked colder and younger than ever as she gazed through her eyeglass at the children.

"Visitors of yours, Sir Anthony?"

"Wards," said Sir Anthony, with a little smile deftly concealed under his long moustache. "Elfrida and Henry Paston."

"Indeed! What Pastons are they? The Pastons of Somersetshire? How do you do?" said Lady Kesterton, with a slight inclination of her head to Henry, who had smiled at her. At Elfrida she continued to look steadily and curiously, but without bestowing any greeting upon the girl.

Sir Anthony coughed, and Henry answered the last

question for himself. "I am not very well, thank you; I never am. But I have not so much pain as I used to have, because of this beautiful couch Sir Anthony got for me. You see it lifts up and down, and I can write or read quite easily." He was used to explaining his condition and its alleviations to visitors. Perhaps Lady Kesterton was attracted by his face or his tone, for she went and stood beside him, looking at him as he talked. He showed her the mechanism of the couch, and put the reading-desk up and down for her. "Wasn't it kind of Sir Anthony?" he said, with a smile so sweet that one could hardly have supposed it possible that he could ever be an object of dislike.

"Very kind," said Lady Kesterton, with extreme emphasis. Then she turned to listen to what Sir Anthony was saying.

"You locked us out, did you?" with a slightly displeased but still more amused accent. "And why, may I ask?"

"You said I might keep out all the world, if I liked," said Elfrida, defiantly—"that I was queen of the west wing, and might do what I pleased with it."

Sir Anthony shrugged his shoulders, and his wife once more bestowed a stare through her long-handled glass upon the audacious Elfrida.

"Ah," he said lazily, "you are deposed, Elfrida. This lady is the queen of the whole house, as you will see before very long. Now go and unbolt the door."

She went slowly, her face working, and the tears once more gathering in her eyes. She set the door wide open, and looked at her visitors as if she longed to tell them to go. But Lady Kesterton had walked to the south window, and Sir Anthony stood smiling, as if he rather enjoyed the child's distress.

"What a lovely view!" said Lady Kesterton. "This room would make a charming music-room, Anthony. I wonder you have never turned it to some account."

"It might be used in that way, certainly," said her husband, looking hard at the two agonized young faces now turned to him in mute entreaty.

"The walls colored and the floor stained," said Lady Kesterton, "and soft sage-green silk hangings—it would be charming."

"So it would," agreed Sir Anthony, still smiling.

"But come, Eva, we have the other rooms to see; we need not linger here."

He held open the door for her and let her sweep past him with all the grace of movement for which Lady Kesterton was beginning to be renowned. Then he followed her and shut the door. Neither of them had another word or look for the girl and boy whom their words had plunged into the depth of youth's hopeless, helpless, limitless despair.

As for Lady Kesterton, she said to her husband as soon as the door had closed:

"You are much too kind, I am sure, Anthony. How rudely that girl spoke to you! What a little savage she is!"

"She has not prepossessing manners, certainly," said Sir Anthony, with a laugh.

"So plain, too! I suppose they have no money?"

"Not a penny."

"You are too generous. That boy-oh, how I hate to see deformed people and cripples! Of course I am

very sorry for them, but it makes me sick! I am sure I shall dream of him all night."

"I hope not, dearest." Sir Anthony still affected the lover now and then. They were pacing the picture-gallery, and he put his arm delicately round her waist.

"I should have thought he would be better off in some institution or hospital for such cases, where he could have every appliance and a trained nurse," said Lady Kesterton.

"He has a trained nurse already. Terry, who looks after the children, has all the qualifications."

"Really! And have they been here long?"

"Nearly all their lives," said Sir Anthony dryly.

"Dear Anthony, you are quite too good—quite too unworldly!" said his wife; but in spite of the sweetness of her tone, Sir Anthony smiled, and thought that he recognized a flavor of sub-acidity beneath it.

DESIGNATION AND SHOP

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW MISTRESS.

SIR ANTHONY was an astute man, and knew perfectly well the end his wife had in view. Not being given to illusions, he had never expected her to acquiesce quietly in his arrangement for keeping the little Pastons under his roof; and, indeed, knowing his will to be impregnable, he promised himself some amusement from her efforts to dislodge them. As a matter of fact, Lady Kesterton was more startled and offended by her encounter than she chose to allow. She had heard of the children before her marriage, and had awaited with some anxiety the explanation that she fully expected Sir Anthony to make. Of course, she said to herself, he would give her the history of these children, about whom rumor had been so busy. But to her very great surprise, he did not say one word; and it was not for her, she told herself, to ask questions about his private affairs. But his silence, during the three months of their absence among Swiss alps and Scottish moors, had seemed a sort of assurance that whatever was likely to displease her in their future life together had been got rid of; and she came back to Kesterton in full conviction that the two little interlopers, of whom she had heard, had been quietly sent away to school or to some other home.

The last thing she anticipated was to find them in-

stalled at the Park—"in the best part of the house," as, by an angry exaggeration, she told herself—with a suite of rooms, an attendant, every possible comfort and luxury, and evidently also—perhaps this point annoyed Lady Kesterton more than any other, with the habit of taking their own way. To Lady Kesterton this was intolerable. And, quite unreasonably, she felt as if she had been deceived.

It was natural that she should somewhat exaggerate to herself the advantages of the children's position. Elfrida certainly had the range of a large house and fine grounds; Henry's sufferings had every alleviation that money could procure. For him, at least, Sir Anthony did not spare expense. Apart from her dislike to pain and sickness in all their manifestations, Lady Kesterton did not object so much to Henry.

He could be kept out of her way: probably he would not live long; and there was nothing about him to be dreaded. The utmost Sir Anthony was likely to do for him was to leave him an annuity by will; and to this, also, Lady Kesterton had no objection. It was Elfrida who was the thorn in her side; Elfrida—whom, for reasons of her own, she hated as soon as she looked at her; Elfrida—who must at all costs be got out of the house.

She was a difficult child to govern, and even more difficult to understand. It was saddening to her to see Henry in his hours of pain. Terry was not the wisest of companions, and she had few friends besides Terry and Henry. There were long hours during which she roamed about the Park, dreaming of all things outside her actual life, or sat curled up in one of the window-seats of the picture-gallery, absorbed in the perusal of

some old story-book which she was reading for the hundredth time.

The one new interest in life which had lately accrued to her came from Philip Winyates's discovery that neither she nor Henry was being taught anything. Terry had shown her how to read and write, and she had taught Henry—that was all.

Sir Anthony met Philip's representations with a scowl.

"I am sure I go to enough expense for those children without providing tutors and governesses for them," he had said ill-naturedly. "The boy is too ill to be taught much; and the girl—oh, it doesn't matter about the girl!"

That was always the refrain, the shadow, that overhung Elfrida's life—she was but a girl, and it did not matter about a girl. Terry said the same thing, though she did not mind it from her. Sir Anthony implied it by every glance of his eye and every tone of his voice. She was of less than no importance—she was only a girl!

Strange to say, Philip thought that a girl's character and mental training were as important as those of a boy; and as Sir Anthony would not procure a teacher for her, he set to work to organize some scheme of work which he himself could superintend. He told her what to read and what to learn, corrected her sums and her Latin, took her out with him to sketch, and allowed her occasionally the treat of copying a letter or a manuscript. Until Philip took her in hand two years before, Elfrida had been a veritable little dunce; but she was naturally quick, and the previous emptiness of her life made intellectual work a great joy and a great re-

source to her. But for Philip she would have been desolate indeed.

Philip had grown quite naturally and by imperceptible degrees into a fixture at Kesterton Park. He had plenty to do in looking after the estates, and also in assisting Sir Anthony with his literary work. Phil himself was ready with his pen, and found time to write a good many critical and literary articles, which were admitted into two or three of the leading magazines and reviews. His name was becoming known in the world of letters; and with his growing fame, his quiet country life, and his steady routine of every-day work he had reason to be well content.

But all this seemed likely to be changed by Sir Anthony's marriage. Lady Kesterton's alterations in the rooms of the house pointed to some alteration in its master's habits. Kesterton Park was to be thrown open to the world again; and the world was all agog to come, to pry, and to investigate. For a quiet man like Philip there would very soon be no place at all.

He spoke of this to Sir Anthony soon after his return, and suggested that he should take rooms in the village or hire and furnish a little house. Sir Anthony poohpoohed the idea.

"If my wife sees company," he said, "that is no reason why we should not shut ourselves up here, if we choose, and do our own work as usual. She knows that I do not intend always to show at the big parties she talks of giving. I shall want somebody to keep me in countenance."

"You will not want me long," said Philip smiling.

"Well, if I'm not a sufficient attraction to you, there

are the children," said Sir Anthony, rather adroitly, "and they would be stranded without you."

Philip was silent for a minute or two and then said hesitatingly:

"Will not Lady Kesterton take them in hand?"

"No, by Jove! she won't," said Sir Anthony, with a little smile. Then, looking keenly at his cousin, he added: "Don't you see how she hates them already?"

"Hates them! Surely not."

"Yes, she hates them. And if you want to do them a good turn and me a favor, Phil, you would go to her to-morrow morning and tell her their history."

"Is that not your business rather than mine?"

"Don't be touchy, dear boy. We have had a sharp word or two about them already, and madam's tongue is something of a sword. Tell her you come from me, and she will listen."

Philip was reluctant to take this mission upon himself, but Sir Anthony pressed the suggestion. And, having yielded at last, it came to pass that he sought Lady Kesterton next morning in her boudoir and begged to speak to her.

Eva was coldly surprised. She had never liked Philip Winyates; and it seemed to her ridiculous and almost insulting that he should be made the envoy of her husband. However, she consented to hear him, and listened, almost in silence, while he told her the story of the Paston children, as Sir Anthony had recounted it to him.

"It is a little incomplete," she said, looking away from him with an impassive face. "You do not tell me their real name, nor the name of their father."

"I do not know it myself. I understood that Sir

Anthony was bound by a promise until they had reached a certain age."

"It seems that Sir Anthony can keep a secret."

"His friend's secret!" said Phil, somewhat hotly; for the cold, pale woman always irritated his nerves. It was more on account of her presence, than because of the coming gayeties, that he had wished to leave the house.

She bowed her head politely.

"Thank you, Mr. Winyates. Is that all?"

"That is all my message," said Philip, with embarrassment. "I should like to say, for my own part, what interesting and intelligent children they are: lovable, I think, beyond the common run of children, and much in need of care and—and a mother's love."

A terrible flash shot from Lady Kesterton's blue-gray eyes.

"It is scarcely my part to be a mother to them," she said coldly. "But of course they will have every care and attention that Sir Anthony desires."

Philip, perceiving that his audience was at an end, was about to leave the room; but an abrupt question detained him for a minute.

"The girl—I should think the girl was clever?"

"She is naturally clever, but she has not been taught very much."

"And she will have no money, I understand?"

"I believe not."

"She ought to be trained to do something useful."

"Yes," said Philip, scarcely realizing what she meant by this remark. "If she were well taught I think she might easily make a position for herself."

And then Lady Kesterton let him go.

Sir Anthony thought that he had done very wisely in making Philip his ambassador, for at luncheon that day he found his wife smiling, calm, and amiable: quite disposed to agree with him on every conceivable point, and to flatter him about his literary productions. Sir Anthony listened with a little of the air of a cat that is being stroked. His bent brows relaxed, his lips twitched and pushed his moustache upward as he smiled at her. He was quite satisfied with the result—and so was she.

When they were alone together, she said pleasantly: "There was no need to send Philip to tell me the story of your generosity, dear. I should like to have heard it from your own lips."

He cast a quick glance at her.

"You were annoyed with me, dearest, and I had not the courage to plead my own cause."

"Ah, how foolish of you!" she said, in her sweetest tones. Then, after a little pause: "Philip says that one of your *protégés* is very clever—that she ought to be educated."

"Educated! She is only a girl-what does it matter?"

"Dear Anthony! The poor child must be properly taught, or she will blame us afterward. If she has talent, what a pity to waste it—to see it running wild!"

Sir Anthony was a little puzzled. Had his wife really developed an interest in Elfrida? What did all these praises of her mean? They continued for some days. Elfrida's quickness, Elfrida's talent for drawing, for music, for languages, Elfrida's abilities in general, were forced upon his attention until he was tired of the subject.

"I think I have heard enough about that child's tal-

ents," he said one day in the dryest of tones. "I never had so much of her in my life before. She is becoming a nuisance."

Lady Kesterton put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I did not mean to vex you, Anthony. I only wished to rouse you to a sense of your duty. The poor girl is dependent upon you, and you are not fitting her for her future position—whatever that may be. There are capital schools at Brighton or Eastbourne—"

"Elfrida is not going to school," said Sir Anthony, rising and leaving the room, with a frown of extreme displeasure upon his brow.

So this was what she had been striving to bring about! No, he was not going to send the child away to please her. If she was so keen about Elfrida's education, he did not mind paying a governess to come and live in the house.

But here he met with the obstacle of another will, as inflexible in its way as his own.

Lady Kesterton absolutely refused to have a governess in the house.

Sir Anthony grumbled to Philip, but found to his surprise, that Philip was rather on Lady Kesterton's side. School would be the very thing for Eifrida. The only difficulty would be the separation from her brother. What Henry would do without her, and how she would bear to leave him, Philip could not possibly imagine. And again Sir Anthony refused—rather violently this time—to separate the children or to send the girl away from Kesterton.

But as continual dropping wears away the hardest stone, so Sir Anthony's adamantine will began to be impaired by the trickling of his wife's reproaches, After all, why should not Elfrida go to school? It might be better for her—it would certainly be better for his domestic peace. As to Henry, he must remain where he was. There was a curate in the village who could come up and read with him every day if he wanted education. He and his sister would spend the holidays together, and that would be enough for them.

Sir Anthony's decision was given with considerable irritation of tone and manner, but his wife had gained her point, and did not mind how she gained it. In spite of prejudices and narrowness, she tried, in her own way, to be just, and really set to work to find a really good school for the little girl. She also authorized her own maid to overhaul Miss Paston's wardrobe, and to furnish her with a list of the things that she would require.

At present, however, Elfrida was not informed of her destiny. It was December before Sir Anthony yielded to his wife's urgings, and she could not be sent away until the beginning of another term.

In the mean time, guests were coming to the house, and, in view of any possible revolt or lamentation on Elfrida's part, it was decided that she should not know what was to happen to her.

Philip thought the decision unwise, for he knew she would half break her heart over the separation from Henry, and that it might be well to accustom brother and sister beforehand to the idea of parting; but he was overruled, and felt it his duty to keep silence.

Terry's idea, when she saw the new frocks and hats and shoes that were daily arriving for Miss Elfrida Paston, was that her darling was going to be introduced to all the "fine folks" who were to spend Christmas at Kesterton; and she overflowed with pride and contentment at the prospect.

"Going down to breakfast and luncheon maybe you are," she said to Elfrida, "and out for drives and rides; perhaps some other young lady going to stay here with you, and you're to be got ready to be a companion for her. That will be nice, won't it, dearie?"

"I don't think I like girls," said Elfrida. "At least, I don't know any, but—"

"Oh, you mustn't speak in that way, Miss Elfie; it ain't becoming. You must hold up your head and remember you're as good as any of them. I heard something about Lord and Lady Beltane coming, and perhaps they will bring Lord Beltane's step-sister, that's about your age, I believe. That will be nice for you."

Elfrida was silent for a minute.

"What is her name?" she asked at length, almost unwillingly.

"Lady Betty Stormont. I don't know whether that's her Christian name or not; maybe it's Lady Elizabeth; but everybody calls her Lady Betty."

"Lady Betty! I like that name; it sounds awfully jolly," said Henry from his sofa. "I hope she'll come, don't you, Elfie?"

"I don't know what it is like to have girls to play with," said Elfie. "Perhaps she'll be proud and disagreeable—all fuss and feathers, like the doctor's daughters in the town—and not choose to speak to me."

There was already a resentful tone in her voice.

"Oh, but she can't do that if she's staying here," said Henry cheerfully. Then, struck by some sense of the absurd, he burst into the rippling, chuckling boy's laugh, that almost seemed incongruous when it came from that invalid couch, and cried, "How funny it would be to see Elfie and this Lady Betty Somebody walking up and down the picture-gallery and refusing to speak to one another! Wait, I must draw them; give me a piece of paper and I'll show you how they would look."

Quick as thought he was at work, and his pencil soon depicted the imaginary scene—Elfrida with her chin in the air, meeting an impossible Betty, "all fuss and feathers," with eyes averted and a supercilious smile upon her face. The likeness of Elfrida was unmistakable, for the boy had an extraordinary faculty for catching likenesses; but the imaginary Lady Betty was simply comic and absurd. The children laughed over the drawing, and shut it up in a volume of their productions, little imagining that it would ever come to life again, or be seen by any but friendly eyes.

Visitors arrived in quick succession, but, contrary to Terry's expectations, Elfrida was not sent for to the drawing-room. She grew a little restless under the strain of suspense; for she had begun to picture to herself the joys and excitement of society, and was anxious for them to begin.

"Lady Beltane's come," she heard Lady Kesterton's maid say to Terry, as they tried another new frock on Elfrida's slim childish figure. "My lord's left at home, as I expected."

"Why did you expect that?" asked Terry.

"Oh, well—there isn't much love lost, I think. My lady's a good bit younger than him; and there's an attraction here for her. I suppose you knew of that engagement—"

Terry frowned and signed to her not to speak before Elfrida.

"Oh, well, there was no secret about it," said the maid, not very much abashed. "He was madly in love with her, as everybody knew; and she liked him well enough, although she jilted him. I almost wonder he's here; but I suppose the master can't get on without him."

"It's years ago," said Terry reprovingly.

"Four, since her marriage. She isn't more than twenty-three, and he's about seven or eight and twenty. Everybody thought that he would go out of his mind when she threw him over. Perhaps she wants to whistle him back again, now that she's tired of my lord. She'll never be satisfied until she's quite broken his heart."

Mrs. Terry, careful of Elfie's morals, changed the subject; but the child heard and remembered every word. It was easy for her to apply what had been said to Philip. Henceforth the name of Lady Beltane had a curious and hateful fascination for her.

CHAPTER XII.

"THAT TROUBLESOME GIRL."

Beatrice, Lady Beltane, was not perhaps so determined upon the subjugation of Philip Winyates as her maid had represented her to be; but she came to Kesterton lazily ready to renew her flirtation with him, and a little curious to see whether he had changed.

"Certainly he is changed," she said to herself, as she watched him from the low velvet chair in a dim corner of the drawing-room on the first evening of her arrival. "He is not a boy now; he is a man, and a distinguished-looking man—not countrified, as I half expected him to be. He will not look at me—that shows that he is afraid. I must calm his fears, poor boy, or I shall get no amusement out of him."

So, when she caught his eye, she signalled to him with her fan to come and sit down beside her. She noticed that he advanced with a hardly concealed reluctance, and did not smile when he seated himself. Lady Beltane smiled, if he did not; but her smile was concealed by that convenient, ever-ready feather fan.

"You have scarcely spoken to me at all to-night," she said. "Have you forgotten me?"

"No, I have not forgotten," he answered quietly, but with marked emphasis on the last word. She looked at him: his face was refined, intellectual, a little stern.

She liked it better than in its boyish and perhaps more handsome days.

"Nor forgiven?" she asked softly, raising her lovely eyes to his face and dropping them again.

He laughed slightly.

"Have I anything to forgive, Lady Beltane? On the contrary, I ought to be very grateful."

"Grateful, Philip?"

"You were so wise," he said, with the touch of irony which he had perhaps caught from Sir Anthony, and which she found novel in him and rather delightful. "You knew so well what I needed and what you needed, and took the means to satisfy the aspirations of both. I, you see, was by nature formed for a scholar and recluse; and you are essentially a woman of the world. We have each got what we wanted, have we not?"

She listened with some surprise in her blue eyes. He did not talk in this way in the old days, certainly. But her woman's instinct told her that his cynicism was a little unreal. She answered almost tenderly:

"You may have got what you wanted—though I doubt it; but I have not."

Her voice sank to a whisper as she spoke. Philip started and looked at her quickly—then looked away again, as he murmured, with a rather satirical smile:

"Dead Sea fruit?"

"Oh, Philip, you are cruel!"

And he answered, almost savagely, though still in the lowest possible tone:

"Was I cruel first?"

She turned away from him, as if offended, and began a conversation with Sir Anthony, who had just drawn near. In reality she was perfectly satisfied, even elated, at her success. Philip had not forgotten her—so much was certain; and if he had not forgiven, that simply showed that she had power over him still. She was, to begin with, a thorough flirt; and yet she had a grain of sincerity in her liking for Philip Winyates, who was really, as she had said in jest to her cousin, the only man who had ever touched her heart. She was determined to bring him once more to his allegiance; she loved to have men at her feet, and this man, in particular, must not be suffered to escape. The estimate formed of her by Lady Kesterton's maid was very fairly true: she would not be satisfied until she had done her best to break Philip Winyates's heart.

Christmas Day was too full of varied occupations, not to say amusements, for her to pursue her designs upon him. Besides, to Lady Beltane's vexation, Philip was invisible for a great part of the day. Nobody knew, or would tell, where he had gone; but Sir Anthony and Lady Kesterton were well aware that he had chosen to walk with Elfrida to a church a mile or two away, and then to preside at the children's Christmas dinner, which otherwise they would have had to eat with no other companionship than that of Terry.

It seemed hard to him that Elfie should not be allowed to come down-stairs and take some share in the festivities that were going on; but when he hinted this to Sir Anthony he was met by so cold a look of denial that he could not pursue the subject. All that he could do was to devote his morning and afternoon to the brother and sister, and make merry with them in his own quaint, amusing, yet tender fashion. For the man who could be cynical with Lady Beltane, coldly courteous to his cousin's wife, and business-like with Sir

Anthony and his tenants, could also be very gentle in his dealings with children, and could amuse them by the hour together with games and stories, the simplicity of which would have provoked a contemptuous smile from the fine company down-stairs.

It was owing to his tact and gentleness that Elfrida did not pout at her exclusion from the Christmas Day festivities, and was led to believe that it was far "nicer" to have their dinner to themselves in the west wing and to frolic to their hearts' content than to be "dressed up" and "behave properly" in the drawing-room.

There was no lack of good cheer in the west wing parlor, nor of bonbons and Christmas presents. Sir Anthony was somewhat lavish in ordering all that could be desired in that way, and Phil himself regulated the choice of gifts. So he was hardly seen by Lady Beltane until dinner-time, and then she turned a cold shoulder on him because he had been away so long. Philip bore her coldness with equanimity; he wished very ardently to be left in peace.

But that was the last thing Beatrice thought of doing. She wanted to torment him; to awaken the sleeping lion in him; to make him thoroughly miserable again. Then she would be satisfied, not before.

Her opportunity came, as she thought, two days after Christmas Day. He came into the picture-gallery, which was well warmed and formed an agreeable promenade, and began to walk up and down, as his manner was when he was disturbed in mind. It was growing dusk and he did not notice at first that Lady Beltane was standing beside one of the windows. She waited for a few moments, then, as the tramp continued, she

grew somewhat piqued at his want of quickness of observation.

"You are very much absorbed," she said at last, in a voice that was both sweet and angry at the same time—a voice that could hardly fail to rouse a man from any depth of absorption. Philip started, looked round, and then walked slowly to the recess.

"You are here!" he said, after a little pause.

"I am here. Are you sorry?"

"How should I be sorry? Of course, I am always pleased to see you."

"You do not show your pleasure. You have avoided me ever since I came."

Her voice was plaintive now; the faint light from the window showed something like moisture in her beautiful eyes, something like a quiver of her charming lip. Philip began to think that perhaps he had been unkind.

"I did not mean to avoid you, Lady Beltane," he said seriously; "but the fact is our paths lie too far apart. It is not well to act as if they were nearer to one another."

"Apart!" she said incredulously; "but why need they lie apart? You are not always in the country; you come to London sometimes. I have often wondered why you never came to see me—"

He interrupted her, with a shaken voice, a sudden change of countenance.

"Oh, no!" he said; "you cannot have wondered, Beatrice. Surely you knew—you knew."

She put out her hand and laid it on his arm.

"Phil, indeed I did not mean to hurt you so."

"You did not mean—that is what women always say. Do you think it makes the hurt any better?"

He had grown fierce and abrupt, but she was not displeased; she was moved almost to tears, but there was pleasure in her heart.

"Forgive me," she murmured. "Oh, Phil, forgive me, and be my friend again!"

Her eyes were lustrous with tears; her face was very near to his, her hands lay lightly upon his arm. He was tempted to give her the word of tenderness for which she begged—tempted to forget that she belonged to another and not to him. For he loved her still, and believed that in her heart of hearts she loved him too.

It was a moment which might have had a dangerous ending but for an unexpected interruption.

Out of the gathering dusk a little figure suddenly emerged and stood before them. The shadows of the gallery seemed to have mingled themselves with the child's long masses of dusky hair. Her face looked pale in the darkness. Beatrice gave a little scream and clutched Philip's arm.

"I was sitting in the other window-seat and I thought you did not know I was here," said Elfrida's clear little voice.

Lady Beltane withdrew her hand and laughed.

"Good gracious!" she said; "I thought that it was one of the pictures stepping out of its frame. Why, she's just like—"

And there she stopped short. Philip took up the word; he spoke kindly, but there was a vague displeasure in his tone.

"Why are you here, Elfie?" he said.

"Henry was so ill," the child answered, "and in there I could not get out of the way of his crying, and I

couldn't bear it any longer. So I came to sit here just for a little while."

"Henry is ill, is he? Has the doctor been sent for? I beg your pardon, Lady Beltane, but will you excuse me? This little girl's brother has a good deal of suffering, and I must do all I can for him. Come, Elfrida."

He walked away deliberately, leaving Lady Beltane, as she afterwards described it, plantée la, without a word to say for herself, She stamped her foot with impatience as soon as he was out of sight,

"The little marplot!" she said viciously. "I believe she did it on purpose." Then, being changeable as the wind, she suddenly burst out laughing. "Poor Phil! he was nearly kissing me," she said to herself. "I'll be even with that little minx some day. She is 'The Mystery,' I suppose."

For by that name the little Pastons were familiarly known in the circle of Sir Anthony's acquaintances.

She was not actively ill-natured, and did not know that she would be doing Elfrida any harm by mentioning the occurrence to her cousin Eva. But Lady Kesterton was seriously annoyed by it, especially when Beatrice commented on the likeness borne by the child to one of the portraits in the gallery.

"Let me see: this is the 28th of December. I cannot ask Miss Forsyth to take her before the 6th of January. But on the 6th—yes, she shall go then; and it will be a long time before I have her back again. I will write to Miss Forsyth at once."

Henry's attack of pain was acute, but had no serious consequences, and Philip soon recovered from the vexation which Elfrida's interruption had occasioned him. He questioned the child, with some curiosity, as to her

reasons for speaking to him just at that moment. Why had she not addressed him earlier? She must have seen him come into the gallery.

"I had been crying at first," Elfrida explained, "and when that lady came in, a little while before you, I didn't like to disturb her."

"But you disturbed us both afterwards."

Elfrida blushed and looked so unhappy that Philip was surprised.

"What was it?" he asked, and pressed her so earnestly and repeatedly to speak that at last she yielded up her secret reason.

"They said she would not be content till she had broken your heart—and I—I didn't like to hear you talking to her."

But she would not tell him who "they" were, nor why she identified the "she" with Lady Beltane, and when he saw that she was more inclined to cry than to reveal anything, he finally left her in peace.

But the remark startled him: it made him suspicious of his surroundings, and disposed to distrust his own self-control. It separated him from Beatrice far more than he himself understood.

The intimation that Elfrida was to go to school on the sixth of January was first made to the child by Lady Kesterton's maid, in the very manner which Philip would have deprecated. He had meant to talk to her about it, and to show her gently that it was for her good and for Henry's good that she should go away for a little while and learn lessons with other girls. But he had no chance of trying to soften the blow, and it fell with a suddenness which crushed brother and sister to the earth.

He came in one afternoon to find Henry white and exhausted with crying, and Elfrida flat on the floor of her room, refusing to eat or speak. When at last he prevailed on her to look up, her one cry was that she would not go—she would not leave Henry—she could not live without him. Her mother had told her always to take care of Henry, and she would not go; and nothing Philip said produced the slightest impression upon her. His remonstrances were at last followed by floods of tears and choking sobs, but with no abatement of her obstinate determination "never to leave Henry." And next day matters did not mend, but rather grew worse.

All this came to Lady Kesterton's ears, and caused her to bite her lips with anger. Sir Anthony had gone away for a few days—perhaps he foresaw the tempest. But when he came back—if Elfrida were not then gone, would she not throw herself upon his mercy and entreat to be allowed to stay? And in that case, might he not relent?

Lady Kesterton resolved to see what she could do to break the will of this rebellious girl. She did not want to have her carried down-stairs and put into the carriage and the train by main force, although she was quite capable of having the matter settled in that way if necessary. But she would try the effect of her persuasions first. She accordingly sent a message to the west wing asking Elfrida to come to her in her boudoir.

The child came at Philip's bidding only, though Lady Kesterton did not know it. She did not wear her most prepossessing look. She was white with weeping and anxiety; her eyes were red and swollen, her hair was tangled, her dress untidy. Lady Kesterton, sitting on a comfortable chair by the fire, regarded her with critical dislike. Elfrida stood at about two yards' distance from her, away from the soft rug on which Lady Kesterton's feet were resting.

"I hear you have an objection to going to school," she said icily, and in the tone in which one addresses a grown-up person. "I wish to hear from yourself what the objection is."

The child's soft hands clinched themselves; she was trying to keep back her tears, and the effort made her voice sound abrupt and hard as she replied:

"I can't leave Henry—I won't go!"

"You know, I suppose, that you cannot help yourself? that you must go whether you wish or not?"

"I won't go!—I'll run away!—I'll come back again!" burst from Elfrida with a sort of stifled fury. "This is my home—and I won't leave my brother!"

Lady Kesterton looked at her sternly and kept silence for a moment.

"How old are you?" she asked, at length.

"Thirteen."

"You are old enough to understand, then, when the truth is spoken to you. Listen to me. You talk of this place as your home. You have not the least right to consider it your home. You have no right here at all. But for Sir Anthony's kindness, you and your brother would be outcasts, beggars, workhouse children. You have no money of your own; you live on Sir Anthony's charity. The frock you are wearing was bought with Sir Anthony's money. You owe everything you have in the world to him, and therefore it is your plain duty to obey him. But there is no question of obedience in the matter. If Sir Anthony wishes to

turn you out, you have no more choice about going than if you were a beggar-girl to whom he had given a dinner. So you had better go quietly."

"I do not want to stay. I would rather go to the workhouse!" cried the passionate, impetuous child's voice.

"So would I," said Lady Kesterton coldly. "I wish you had gone to the workhouse long ago. It was your proper place. But you would not have been the sufferer in that case. It would have fallen harder on your brother. Do you think that in the workhouse he would have had a nurse, and a sunny, comfortable room, and an invalid couch, and dainties of every kind? I suppose he would have died long ago, but for Sir Anthony's goodness to him. And now, like a silly little fool, you want to throw all these advantages away."

"Not for him," said Elfrida tremulously. "Only—for myself. And he would not be happy without me."

"Would he be happier with you in a hovel or an attic? In the workhouse you would be separated, of course. There is nothing to prevent your both leaving Kesterton, if you like. He could go into a hospital, and you could become a scullery-maid. You must remember you will have to work for your living when you are grown up. You cannot live on charity then, surely. Well, unless you want to be merely a maid-servant, or a milliner, you must have a decent education. Sir Anthony offers it to you at a good school. You cannot take your brother to school with you, or expect to live here all your life. Why do you make a hardship of what is really a piece of good fortune which you don't in the least deserve?"

The cold, steely tones of the voice produced a strangely subduing effect upon Elfrida. As Lady Kesterton said, she was quite old enough to understand. She said, in a low, husky voice:

"I will go; then-you'll take care of Henry?"

"Sir Anthony will do what he thinks right," said Lady Kesterton, dryly.

In another second or two the interview was over, and Elfrida was on her way back to the west wing, with tearless eyes indeed, but white face and crushed, miserable heart. But she offered no further opposition to the scheme. Lady Kesterton had effectually taken all the resistance out of her.

She left the Park on the sixth of January, therefore; and as it fell out, she did not see it again until full seven years had passed.

CHAPTER XIII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

"Well, I call this jolly! Did you ever see anything finer, Elfie?"

The speaker was a young fellow of seventeen or eighteen, who was lying almost flat in an invalid hand-carriage, which was being drawn along the promenade of a quiet watering-place one afternoon in September. The cheerful tone of his words contrasted strongly with the pallor of his face and the evidently enforced prostration of his attitude; and it was no wonder that people often turned to look at him as he passed, and to look also from him to the beautiful girl, radiant with health and strength, who was almost always at his side.

Henry Paston was perhaps a trifle stronger than he used to be; but the malady from which he suffered was said to be incurable. He had no power to support himself at all, and had to be lifted from place to place; but he invariably showed the sunny, light-hearted disposition that he was blessed in possessing, and was never heard to complain of the blight upon his young life. His sufferings gave more mental pain to his sister than to himself; but Elfrida's disposition was always of a stormy cast, and she frequently went through heights and depths of depression and elation which Henry could by no means understand.

Walking beside him now, she turned on him a look

of dark-eyed pathos, which arose half out of her affection, half out of her pity, for him, and answered, somewhat sedately:

"I think it is lovely, Henry. How glad I am that I could come to you this year."

"Well, I should think you had had enough of that old German school—to say nothing of the French pension—by this time. You are twenty, Elfie; quite a finished young lady. I wonder what you will do next!"

"I suppose I shall begin to teach what I have learnt," said Elfrida, with a smile. "That is the next step. I wish we could stay here together. If we had a nice little house, and I had pupils—"

"Yes, it would be very nice," said Henry, "but—for some things, you know—I should be sorry to leave Kesterton."

The little carriage had been drawn up at the end of the esplanade, and the faces of brother and sister were turned toward the sea. No listeners were near, and they could pursue their conversation as freely as if they had been sitting in the house. Elfrida's face was a little sad as she looked out to the horizon. There was some disappointment in her heart.

"I am not such a brute as you think me, dear. It isn't because I care for luxurious food and lodging—indeed, our poor old west-wing parlor is not luxurious at all—and I have no preference whatsoever for a mansion to a cottage; but you know that all my associations cluster about Kesterton Park. I have never known any other home, and I am such a poor fool that I sometimes think I could not bear to be transplanted. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, I think I do, Harry dear. Only it seems strange to me that you should care to live in a place on sufferance—"

"Is it on sufferance?" he said, smiling. "Perhaps it is, and I am too weak to mind very much. Wherever I am I shall always be on sufferance, you see, Elfie. I am on sufferance in the world, and must dree my weird."

But the pale, beautiful face wore so sweet and brave a smile that it did not seem as if the consciousness troubled him very much. She drew a quick little breath of sympathy, and laid her hand on his for a moment as it lay on the edge of the carriage. "Then—they don't make you feel that?" she asked him—vaguely enough, although he knew what she meant.

"They are all very kind to me. Oh, you don't know them, Elfie. Sir Anthony is most generous, most lavish; and he has lately taken to coming to sit with me sometimes. Then there's dear old Phil; he never forgets me, although he is such a literary swell nowadays. And my room has lately looked like a nursery, for the two tots are always in and out, you know."

"Sir Anthony's children?"

"Yes, Janey and Gerald. You've never seen them, have you, dear? You'll be delighted with them when you come back to Kesterton."

"But I am not going back to Kesterton," said Elfrida, with a sudden recoil of two paces. "I should not think of such a thing!"

"Why, Elfie! You will go back—now that you have left school—if only to see them and thank them for their kindness to us."

"I could do that by letter. The Kestertons have

been generous to us, Henry, but I do not call them kind."

"You grieve me when you say so, Elfie dear."

She looked at him in silence, and wondered whether he had never complained even to himself at certain hardships and grievances that had fallen to his lot. She knew well enough how wearisome those two rooms in the west wing sometimes became to him, and how Lady Kesterton had always refused to let him be seen in any other part of the house. When she and Sir Anthony were away his chair might be wheeled up and down the picture-gallery; but he had never been farther in his life. When he went into the Park he was carried out at the garden door. Then there were hourslong hours-of loneliness, when nobody seemed to remember the existence of an invalid in the house. There were nights when he could not sleep because of the music and dancing that went on in the picture-gallery; but no voice was ever hushed for him, no woman's hand but that of the faithful Terry ever smoothed his couch or stroked his fevered brow when he was in pain. Lady Kesterton had never set foot within his room since the day after her arrival in the house. Even the servants cried shame upon her coldness of heart; but Henry never seemed to have noticed that she was cold.

It was to Terry, rather than to Henry, that Elfrida was indebted for these details of his life. The little that Henry told her was imprinted with his own unfailing cheerfulness. And she had no opportunity of observing his life at Kesterton, for, as we have seen, she had not been to the place for several years. Her absence had been due to Lady Kesterton's clever management rather than to any express degree of ban-

ishment. When Elfrida's holidays began in the August after her first half-year of school life, Lady Kesterton found that Henry needed change of air, and sent him with Mrs. Terry to meet the girl at a quiet little seaside place near Eastbourne. At the following Christmas and autumn holidays she repeated the manœuvre: sending them to Bournemouth or Seaford, according to the time of year, but always manufacturing a good excuse. Philip remonstrated at first, but it soon became clear that these frequent changes were really beneficial to Henry's health, and the boy and girl enjoyed their seaside experiences far more than they would have enjoyed a holiday at Kesterton. Elfrida was too proud to complain; but at first she also regretted the changed arrangements. She had a sort of love for the west wing and the Park and all the associations of her childhooda love which she would not allow. In a year or two, however, she ceased to crave for her old home, and in fact cherished a slight resentment against it and its inhabitants, telling herself that she should be glad if she never saw the Park or the Kestertons again.

When she was sixteen, Lady Kesterton sent her to a German school, whence she came to England only once a year, in the summer-time; and after that she had stayed for some months at a French pension. She was now twenty years old, and had been informed that she had spent her last term at school, and that she might join Henry as usual at Seaford; but what she was expected to do next she had not the faintest idea. Henry's suggestion that she should return to Kesterton was odious to her. She had not been wanted there for seven years; and why should she go back to it again? Her recollections of the old days seemed to her intoler-

ably painful; the cruel speeches that Lady Kesterton had made to her before she went to school had darkened all the memories of her life.

She had not seen Philip Winyates for more than four years. He used to come with Henry sometimes, but of late she had been told that he was too busy. The remembrance of his kindness even was becoming a little vague. He still wrote to her on her birthday and on Christmas Day, but the letters had grown more and more formal and trivial. And sometimes he seemed to forget that she was no longer a child, and used phrases about her school life and her amusements which made her smile, half with vexation, and half with a sense of the purely comic, as she read them. For although she was sixteen when he had seen her last, she had then been a wild, somewhat hoydenish, school-girl, younger than her years, and the change that had come over her since those days was great indeed.

"I thought," she said, coming out of her brown-study at last, "that it might be possible for me to give lessons, and that some day we might live together. But, of course, dear, we can't, if you stay at Kesterton."

"I'll live just where you like, Elfie," said the boy, with a sudden winning smile. But she noticed that he was a little paler and graver than usual all the way home.

"Home" they had fallen into the way of calling it, although it was only an ordinary little lodging-house; but the woman who kept it was honest, clean and kindly, and a great friend of Mrs. Terry's, with whom she often condoled on "Mr. Henry's" weakness and "Miss Elfie's" long absences from England. To Mrs. Terry's credit be it spoken, she had never once confided to her friend

that there was any mystery attaching to the birth and parentage of the young Pastons. She spoke of them discreetly as "wards of Sir Anthony's," and had nothing but good words for his kindness and generosity. If Mrs. Jones scented something behind what she was told, it was not Mrs. Terry's fault.

As the little carriage drew up before the lodging-house door, Mrs. Terry, buxom as ever, with cap-strings flying and gray curls bobbing, flew out to meet her favorite. There was such unwonted excitement in her eye that Elfrida at once felt certain of some unexpected news. And indeed the news came bubbling out of her mouth before Henry could be moved.

"A visitor, my dears. Who do you think? No, not Mr. Winyates, my dear: but he's coming by-and-by. It's Mr. Watson, the lawyer, from the town—would you believe it?—come all the way to see you, Miss Elfie, dear, that he hasn't seen for so many a long day. I call that real kind of him."

The brother and sister glanced at each other. There was a slight apprehensiveness in Henry's eyes, a kindling fire in those of Elfrida. It seemed probable to both of them that Mr. Watson's visit was not so much inspired by mere friendly feeling as by the desires of Sir Anthony and Lady Kesterton. Elfrida was to be inspected, after her long absence and her many years of school.

"Did you say that Philip was coming too?" cried Henry.

"He's at the hotel this very minute, my dear. He's coming up presently. But Mr. Watson is in the sitting-room, and will have a cup of tea with you. So run upstairs, Miss Elfie, and make yourself look nice"—in a

lower tone, "I've put out a clean frock for you, and I'll come up and brush your hair in a minute or two, when I've settled Master Henry on his couch."

Elfrida ran up-stairs obediently; but there was a little smile of defiance on her face as she looked at the "clean frock" which Terry had spread out for her upon the bed. "Why should I make myself 'nice' for Mr. Watson?" she was asking herself. "That he may take a report to Kesterton guaranteeing me a suitable young person to go out governessing, I suppose, and perhaps, as a great treat, to be invited to Kesterton Park. I think that my old cotton is quite in character; I don't think I will change."

She stood before the looking-glass, eyeing the very pretty reflection that she saw therein with a certain disapproval.

"I'm afraid I have not the look of the 'suitable young person,' even in this old gown. If my hair were straighter, I should look more respectable, I think. What does it matter—"

Then her thoughts took a sudden flight in another direction. Did they not say Philip was coming after tea? Philip! After all, he had been the hero, the idol, of all her childish dreams. She made a little grimace as she thought, first of his last letter to her—it contained an allusion to her dolls, she remembered—and then of a book which he had written lately, a book which she had been assured was scholarly and thoughtful and everything else that a cultured man's best book ought to be. "He thinks I am a little girl still," she said, "and now that he is so learned I don't suppose he will know the difference." But the remembrance that he was coming decided her to put on the clean white frock.

Even Mrs. Terry was satisfied with her appearance when the girl was ready to run down to the sitting-room, and called upon Elfrida to admire herself in the glass. But Elfie turned away with a pettish word, although there was a humorous smile upon her lips.

"How does it matter what I am like?" she said. "I am only to be inspected and reported upon. Dear old Terry, the uglier I look the better!"

"Not when it's a gentleman come to see you," said Terry, shrewdly. "If it was a lady I'd agree with you, miss; but you can't be too pretty for a gentleman's taste."

Elfrida laughed and went down-stairs. She was singularly free from vanity or self-consciousness. She knew that she was what people called "pretty," and more than this, that she was striking and original in style; but she was disposed, in her graver moods, to look on beauty as a disadvantage to her, and, in her lighter ones, to depreciate her own good looks. From Mr. Watson's involuntary start when she made her appearance in the sitting-room, she gathered that the white frock was a success. But, although she did not know it, there was something besides beauty in her face which made Mr. Watson start; there was a strong and unmistakable likeness to some one else; and Mr. Watson did not think that a likeness of that kind would count in Elfrida's favor at Kesterton Park.

The years that had passed over his head since the day when Sir Anthony interviewed him on his return from the Continent had touched Mr. Watson very lightly. He was almost white where he had been grizzled, but his face was as smooth and red, his small gray eyes as bright, as ever. His manner to Henry, whom he evidently knew well, was friendly without being familiar; but to Elfrida he was quite alarmingly respectful: he bowed when she spoke to him, he got up, somewhat lumberingly, to open the door for her; he picked up her work-basket when she dropped it, and in fact, conducted himself in such a deferential way as to set Elfrida's sharp wits cogitating.

"I have never been treated with such respect in my life before," she mused to herself as she sat in the bow-window, and busied herself after tea with a strip of silk embroidery; "is there any reason for it? Am I a possible heiress and lady in my own right, as I used to fancy when I was a silly child? Ah, no, it can't be that! Then it must be pure pity: pity for a friendless, penniless girl, who has got to work for a living; it is his way of showing sympathy, and I like him for it. Yes, I do, although it's a little bit stupid and tactless of him to show it so much. But I think he is kindhearted."

And she lifted her large, clear eyes with a look so full of liking and cordiality that Mr. Watson gave a little start, and made an observation to himself which Elfrida, if she had heard it, would not have understood. "Oh, dear, no likeness, no likeness at all!" the old solicitor murmured. "I was mistaken: she is not like any one I know." But he was wrong: Elfrida was very like some one he knew, in feature and in coloring. It was the expression that differed so widely and disguised the real resemblance.

Her look, and his own reflections, gave him the courage that he had hitherto been lacking. He coughed a little, and settled himself in his seat, crossing his legs and folding his arms in his most professional manner.

"I think," he said, "that I had better not disguise from you, Miss Elfrida, the purport of my visit. I have come charged with a message which I will no longer delay." The old gentleman's tone became unusually pompous as he addressed himself to Elfrida; the pomposity was intended to cover a slight feeling of embarrassment. "You are now, I believe, twenty years of age. You have had a—a superior education, one that qualifies you to—to shine in every society—"

"Or to become a nursery governess at twenty pounds a year," interpolated Elfrida briskly. Mr. Watson's pause at that moment had been irresistible.

"Eh?" said the lawyer, nonplussed for the moment.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. There should be no necessity—the fact is, my dear young lady, I come to you from Sir Anthony and Lady Kesterton."

The girl's delicate face suddenly hardened a little. She seemed about to speak; then she glanced at Henry, whose eyes were shining, whose lips smiled, in anticipation of something interesting and pleasant. Elfrida looked down, her brows contracting; and held her tongue.

"Sir Anthony and Lady Kesterton," Mr. Watson went on, with a rather wary glance at his listeners, "are sure, from what they have heard of you, that you have taken advantage of all your opportunities. They are very much pleased with the reports sent from time to time to them of your progress. Their only regret has been that they have not seen more of you. That loss, however, they now desire to repair."

"There! didn't I say so?" said Henry, triumphantly. Elfrida smiled at him, and went on with her needlework.

"They begged me, therefore, to request you to return with your brother in a fortnight's time to Kesterton. Lady Kesterton hopes, I think, to induce you to remain there permanently—in—h'm—some capacity."

"Nurse or scullery maid?" said Elfrida bitterly. She was quoting—although her hearers did not know it—from Lady Kesterton's own words to her when last they had met. "I am very much obliged to Lady Kesterton," she went on, rising from her chair, and beginning to fold up her embroidery, "but I think that I should prefer not to go to Kesterton in any capacity."

Mr. Watson began to protest, but before he could say more than a word or two the door opened, and Philip Winyates was admitted.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE PREJUDICE.

HE stood still for a minute, as if taken by surprise. He remembered Elfie as something of a hoyden, naturally graceful but awkward, as are all growing girls of fifteen, with short frocks and a great tail of black hair fastened by a ribbon, her hands generally gloveless and reddened by sea-water, her hats remarkable for the state of extreme dilapidation which they speedily attained. It was a pleasant enough sketch of a fresh, natural type, but not especially interesting to a man of Philip's calibre. He came in suddenly now upon a very different picture. He saw a graceful, slender girl in a white dress, standing with the look of alert movement still upon her, as if she had just risen from her chair, her curved red lips parted with words just uttered, her oval face still eloquent, her beautiful eyes lighted with scorn which was yet not unlovable, her wellpoised head lightly thrown back, so that the soft long lines of her throat were visible in all their whiteness, and the cloud of dusky hair gathered up from her broad brow and graceful neck looked like a royal crown. It was a revelation seldom made of Elfrida's greatest charms; for in general her old frocks and the monotony of her daily life somewhat obscured the lines and color of her beauty; but to see her as Philip saw her now, with the evening light enveloping her in its golden radiance, and the lustre of strong emotion in her eye, was to remember her forever as a rare vision of youth and loveliness.

Philip made that one short pause, which seemed so little and which implied so much, and then came forward smiling and holding out his hand.

"This is Elfrida, I am sure! You have not forgotten me quite, I hope?"

He had a qualm of doubt when he had said the words. She looked so regal, so unexpectedly mature, that he was not sure of his ground. And was she offended at his rudeness?

"No, indeed, I have not forgotten you. I am very glad to see you again. Did you travel down with Mr. Watson?"

"Yes, we came together," said Philip, as he nodded to Henry and gave a slight touch, half caressing and half playful, to his still golden and curling hair; "but I went to the hotel to order dinner, as I, at least, had had nothing substantial before I came away. If you have done your business, Watson"—with an inquiring glance—"dinner will be ready at eight."

"I had but just begun," said the lawyer rather nervously; "in fact, I had just delivered Lady Kesterton's invitation—Lady Kesterton's kind invitation—to our young friend here; and I am afraid that she does not quite see what Lady Kesterton means." His tone and look were a trifle dubious, and Philip saw that he hardly knew what line to take in so perplexing a situation.

"I think I see what she means quite well," said Elfrida, smiling at Philip in a way that agreeably suggested comradeship.

"I don't think you understand her, Elfie, really," said

Henry, from his couch. Philip liked to see the way in which her face softened as she turned toward him.

"Don't I, dear? Well, perhaps not. You must tell me what I am to think of her, by-and-bye—as you know her so well."

Was there a little touch of sarcasm in the last words? Philip thought so, and was for the moment repelled. He did not like sarcasm in a woman—at least, he had never liked it in the women that he knew. In Elfrida Paston he acknowledged to himself that it might have a certain charm.

"In the mean time," said Philip, "perhaps you will forgive me if I take Mr. Watson to get his dinner. You can talk over the invitation while he is away, and if we may come back for a cup of tea or coffee—"

"There is no hurry about your answer," interposed Mr. Watson rather quickly. "I shall be here for a day or two, and shall, of course, see you again."

"Oh, of course—many times, I hope," said Elfrida brightly. "This evening again, for instance! We shall be delighted if you will come back for coffee."

"Thank you, Miss Paston, but I will not return tonight, I think. I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Winyates, perhaps—"

"I will come if I may," said Philip, and then the two went away to their hotel, and Elfrida and her brother were left alone.

The girl stood silent and thoughtful for a moment, then, observing a rather wistful and troubled look upon her brother's face, she went toward him, sank down in a soft heap of white drapery beside his couch, and began to touch his forehead with her lips in tender, caressing kisses.

"Don't look at me like that, darling. I did not mean to vex you about these Kesterton people. I know you like them—and, yes, they have been generous to us, and I ought not to be ungrateful, but I always feel—"

"How do you feel, Elfie? I can't understand."

"I know you can't, my poor old dear. Well, in spite of all I hear about them and of the way they spend money upon us, I never can help feeling as if they had done us some dreadful wrong."

"Elfie, that is silly!"

"Perhaps it may be, but I can't help it. I think there must be some foundation for it. In fact, if you only knew—but it is useless to talk about it. If they had but made us love them, Henry, it would be so much easier to do what they want us to do."

"I never thought of whether I loved them or not," said Henry wistfully. "I think I do—Sir Anthony, at any rate. What are you shivering for, Elfie? And the children I am sure I love. You would love them, too, if you knew them as well as I do,"

"Lady Kesterton too?"

"Oh, poor Lady Kesterton-well, she is not strong, and you must make allowances for her, Elfie."

"I think you are a perfect angel, Harry. You never seem to think that anybody can be cold, or cruel, or unkind."

"People never are—to me," said the boy cheerfully.

"That is one of the ways in which being an invalid is made up to me, you know. Every one is good. Why, even Lady Kesterton, whom you dislike so much, sends me flowers and fruits and things when I am worse than usual,"

"Does she, dear? I'll try to like her better if she is good to you."

"Oh, yes, she is good! I have very happy times at Kesterton, and I want you to have them too. Gerald and Janey keep me amused for hours at a time. And then there's Lady Betty—you don't know her?"

"Lady Betty? No. Who is she?"

"Lady Betty Stormont; Lord Beltane's half-sister. Lady Beltane is a cousin of Lady Kesterton's, you know!"

"I remember her," said Elfrida, slowly. She was sitting on the floor still, her face turned toward the window, but somehow the brightness had gone out of her face. "Lady Beltane! She was very fair—and beautiful."

"She was beautiful once; I think she is too fat now," said Henry, with the air of a connoisseur. "But Lady Betty—"

"Does Lady Beltane come often to Kesterton?" Elfrida demanded abruptly.

"Yes, rather often. She is a great friend of Philip's. She does not always bring her step-sister-in-law with her, you know. But when she does, Lady Betty finds her way to my room and we have a good time."

Elfrida began to smile. "So there is really a Lady Betty. Do you remember the sketch you made of her and me?—all fuss and feathers, as we said at the time."

Henry laughed. "That was the beginning of our friendship. She came in with Janey one day; and we were very stiff and shy, you know; and little Janey, rummaging among the lower bookshelves, came upon one with a few loose leaves in it. One of these leaves was that picture, and Janey brought it to her to look at.

I saw her color up, and wondered what on earth it was. And then she burst out laughing, and showed it to me. Of course I told her how it was, and all about you, and she was awfully interested. She sat asking questions and talking about you nearly all the afternoon. And we have been great friends ever since."

"How long ago is that, Harry?"

"About two years, I think."

"You never mentioned her in your letters."

Henry colored a little. "I did not want to say much—you might have thought that she was like a sister to me; and nobody's like my sister Elfie."

"I'm glad you think so, dear. I'm not worth it, I fear. And is Lady Betty as old as Lady Beltane?"

"Oh, no; she is not as old as I am: she is only seventeen."

"Is she pretty?"

"Lovely! As fair as—as—I don't know what; as fair as a little child sometimes is, and with flaxen hair, like silk. And she has big blue eyes, and little dimples, just like a child. I should like you to see her, Elfie."

Strange to say, Elfie was immediately conscious of a desire, till then unknown, to go to Kesterton. It seemed to her as if this new acquaintance with the blue eyes and flaxen hair were usurping her sisterly place. If she did not interest herself in Henry's life, in his house and his friends, would she not soon be less to him than the fair, dimpled Lady Betty? It was a very slight suggestion of jealousy, but it shook the girl's resolution not to visit Kesterton Park again.

"Philip will be coming back soon," she said, rising from her lowly position. "I must go and see about the coffee. How nice it looks out of doors!"

"Perhaps Philip would take you out," Henry suggested. "I shall go to bed before long; I am tired—unless you want me to sit up."

"No, dear, do just as you like." And as she left the room, she thought to herself, "I surely don't need to be chaperoned in Philip Winyates's company—Mr. Winyates, I suppose I must say. What a pity it is that we are growing old!" But her sigh was followed by a little smile. "He is really a very good-looking man," she added. "I did not remember that he had so nice a face."

And in truth, the last seven years had given a dignity to Philip's face which it had not worn in its younger days. He wore a small, peaked beard, and this gave him something of the look of an old Vandyke portrait. His brown hair and eyes, broad forehead, long nose, and rather sunken temples, presented the type of the cavalier so well known to us on canvas. It wanted but the love-locks and the lace collar, and he would have passed excellently for a distinguished gentleman of King Charles's train—a hopeless lover, perhaps, of Henrietta Maria—a gallant soldier who had devoted himself heart and soul to a losing cause.

He came back and drank his coffee; and then did as Henry had expected him to do—offered to take Elfrida for a walk on the beach in the sweet dusk of the September evening. Henry himself went to bed, and Elfrida went down with Philip to the sea.

For some time they talked commonplaces; but at last Philip said rather abruptly:

"Forgive me for asking—but is it true, as Mr. Watson tells me, that you have a great objection to going to Kesterton?" "It is quite true. I have a great objection."

He was suddenly aware that this Elfrida was no longer the child whom he used to coax and scold and instruct. She was a woman grown, with instincts and feelings to which he was a stranger. So much the more interesting. He had no clue to the workings of her mind, but he felt that there could be nothing ignoble, nothing actually reprehensible, behind the veil of those clear eyes and speaking features. What then was at the bottom of that refusal to go to Kesterton?

"It cannot be," he said, with a half smile, "that you are shy—nervous—afraid of criticism—"

She drew herself up with a slightly haughty movement. "Certainly not." Then, melting a little, she added with an answering smile, "I don't mean that I don't deserve criticism. But I am not naturally shy. I am only nervous when I wish to please, and think I may fail."

"And you don't wish to please at Kesterton? Well, of course, it is not for me to ask questions. Only you used to look upon me as a friend in the old days, and I felt anxious that you should make this visit. I know that Sir Anthony desires it, and I think you ought to go."

"Yes, Sir Anthony is a friend of yours—a relation," said Elfrida, meditatively. It seemed as if she drew some conclusion which she would not tell, and Philip's curiosity was stirred again immediately.

"Has that anything to do with it?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"No—not directly, at any rate. I wonder, Mr. Winyates, whether I may speak frankly to you and tell you exactly how I feel, as—as I used to do when I was quite a little girl!" "I wish you would. And may I say—you used not to call me Mr. Winyates when you were 'quite a little girl.'"

"Ah, I am a big girl now—that makes all the difference," she said, smiling with a kind of wintry brightness which warned Philip that she was a child to be played with no longer. "But I should like you to understand, and to tell me if you think I am doing wrong."

"I will do my best," said Phil.

Elfrida paused and looked straight out to sea, where the golden light of sunset had faded into the peaceful gray of eventide. The moon was rising in the heavens; the sky was cloudless; the waves lapped over one another with a cool, refreshing sound. If there were confidences to be made, this was the time to make them.

"I said a word or two to Henry just now," she said, "but he was so hurt that I have decided to tell him nothing more. It is just this: I suppose I must be horribly ungrateful—and yet I have always hoped that I was capable of gratitude where—it was—deserved."

"You mean," Philip said gently, "that you cannot feel so much of it as you would like, to Sir Anthony Kesterton?"

"Yes, that is it," she answered quickly. "I know it is base of me, but I can't help it. I understand—and I suppose I am right—that Henry and I have no money of our own; that Sir Anthony has kept us in his house, clothed and fed and educated us, out of—charity; and I know I ought to be eternally grateful to him. Well, with my head I am grateful—not with my heart."

"Very few people would have done as much as he has

done," said Philip, rather lamely. He was looking quite away across the sea, and she could not see his face. "And really—to Henry—"

"Oh, yes, I think he has been kind to Henry, and I do sometimes feel inclined to thank him for that. But for myself—oh, I am grateful, in a sort of way, for my education—but—but I hate him all the time." She broke off, between laughing and crying, and kept silence for a minute or two. "I might have liked him better," she added, "if he had not always hated me."

"No-no-"

"But yes—yes. I am sure of it. And Lady Kesterton hates me more than he does. When I was a naughty child, and did not want to go to school, she spoke to me in a way that I never shall forget. It was cruel—cruel! If only I might write to them and thank them, and then they would let me go?"

"Have you any definite reason for this feeling toward them?" Philip asked. "It is a strange prejudice." She hesitated a little before she replied.

"My mother," she said, hanging her head (for it was seldom she talked about her mother), "told me, before she died, that she *forgave* Sir Anthony. What she meant, of course, I could not tell; but it did not seem as though he had been a very good friend to her. And then—then—" Elfrida's voice grew low—"I saw him strike Henry."

"But, my dear child"—the expression escaped him involuntarily—"you surely cannot think that Henry's present condition is owing to that blow?"

"I am afraid I do. And that is why I find it so hard to be grateful. If it is true," Elfrida went on, with changing color and hurrying voice, "we need not wonder that Sir Anthony has been generous to Henry, and of course I could not be left out in the cold altogether. *Now* do you understand?"

"I think," said Philip gravely, "that you entirely mistake Sir Anthony's character and motives. And I say that if you harbor such views of a man who has, after all, been the greatest of benefactors to your brother and yourself, there is all the more reason for your coming to Kesterton Park and judging for yourself as to whether your childish impressions are false or true. I implore you to come, all the more because I now know what is in your mind."

His earnestness made an impression upon Elfrida.

"If you think so," she murmured.

"I do think so; I am certain of it. You will be acting wrongly, obstinately, if you refuse this invitation. I do not put it on the ground of expediency. Some would ask what you could do, where you could go, if you cast off the Kestertons' help. I do not ask that. With your—your"—he stammered and cast a hurried glance at her—"your advantages, your training abroad, and so on, you could easily provide for yourself. But I ask you to come in justice to Sir Anthony and his wife, and as a sign of love for your brother, who must still be dependent on their kindness."

She turned her face toward him, and he saw that the tears were in her eyes. "You have conquered," she said, softly and sweetly. "I see that you are right, and I will go."

She held out her hand. He took it in his own and held it for a moment or two, experiencing a curious pleasure in the clasp of those slender fingers, and was strangely sorry to let them go.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER SEVEN YEARS.

"Well, Mr. Watson, and what is your report?"

It was Lady Kesterton who asked the question. She was sitting in her boudoir—the room where she had once interviewed Elfrida, and where she now interviewed the family solicitor. It was a pretty room, and Mr. Watson, sitting rather upon the edge of a fragile chair, felt himself a little out of place in so elegant an abode. Two children, a boy and a girl, were gambolling on a rug at Lady Kesterton's feet.

"Yes, Lady Kesterton, I saw the young lady" ("person" was the word that formed itself upon Lady Kesterton's lips, but she did not utter it aloud), "and I thought her very—well, very pleasant, very lady-like, very charming." Mr. Watson's epithets were not perhaps of the most appropriate order.

"Good-looking?" asked the lady.

"I think I may say so. - Good-looking, certainly."

Lady Kesterton made a mental note against Elfrida, and against Mr. Watson too.

"She was very plain when I saw her last," she remarked. "I suppose she was pleased enough to get the invitation?"

Mr. Watson bungled. "I am sure she must have felt it—an honor—a distinction."

"Did she say that she was pleased?" asked Lady Kesterton calmly.

"Well, no, she did not make the remark exactly; but her brother—her brother was delighted."

"It matters very little what that poor deformed, half-witted brother of hers says. I wish to know Miss Paston's attitude of mind. If she is not properly grateful, I shall consider that she must have a very bad disposition."

"I am sure she has not that," said Mr. Watson, cautiously. "But here, I think, is Sir Anthony."

He rose from his chair and pushed it back as if anxious to take his departure, while Sir Anthony, in his dressing-gown, lounged unceremoniously into his wife's boudoir, and seated himself near the small wood fire. The day was not cold, but Sir Anthony's circulation was bad, and he was apt to feel chilly. He turned his face—yellow-white now, and somewhat peevish—toward the solicitor, surveyed him sharply out of his narrow eyes, and fingered his long gray mustache as he spoke.

"Well, Watson, back from your expedition, are you? What result?"

"There was only one result to be looked for," said Lady Kesterton, sharply. "Of course, the girl is only too glad to come."

Sir Anthony gave Mr. Watson a keen glance, and did not read confirmation of his wife's statement in the old man's rosy yet grizzled countenance. He laughed at little to himself, and Mr. Watson looked exceedingly ill at ease.

"Accepted gratefully, did she?" inquired the baronet. "I hardly expected so much grace from her. She

had a curious knack of flying into a rage when she was a child; but perhaps she has learnt to govern her temper now—is more inclined to be humble and submissive, and say, 'Thank you for all favors,' eh, Watson? Is that the latest development?"

Mr. Watson involuntarily shook his head. "I was there for two days only, Sir Anthony, and, of course, I could not form any definite idea as to Miss—Miss Elfrida's modes of thought. She seemed to me very charming and accomplished, and in every way worthy of the greatest good fortune. I think I must bid you good-morning, Lady Kesterton; good-morning, Sir Anthony."

He escaped as quickly as possible, and only just missed hearing Lady Kesterton's comment upon him as he closed the door. "The man is a fool, or in his dotage," she exclaimed.

Sir Anthony again laughed softly to himself. "He always was somewhat puzzle-headed, poor old Watson, and his wits do not grow sharper with age, He seems greatly taken with Elfrida Paston."

"It is to be hoped that she has not grown up idle and frivolous," said Lady Kesterton severely. "For a

girl who has to earn her own living-"

"Well?" asked Sir Anthony, his eyes twinkling as she paused. "For a girl who has to earn her own living—what then?"

"She should be plain, and quiet, and discreet. From something in Mr. Watson's manner, I fancy that she is fast or forward, or vain of her appearance."

"She must not be vain of her appearance if she has to earn her living, certainly," said Sir Anthony, laughing rather oddly, his wife thought. "She had better be ugly, had she not?—like you, Janey," he added, leaning forward to the little girl of six who sat playing quietly with her doll upon the rug. "You have the sort of countenance for a young woman who earns her own living, eh?"

He was particularly fond of depreciating the looks and abilities of his two little children, much to Lady Kesterton's annoyance. She herself was passionately attached to them, and thought them faultless, although it was quite true that neither of them could be called beautiful by the unprejudiced observer. They were not like the Kestertons. They had inherited their mother's coloring. The boy, Gerald, was strong and sturdy, with lint-white locks and commonplace grayblue eyes; while little Janey, his elder by a year, had the same fair hair and complexion, but with dark hazel eyes. She was more delicate-looking than her brother, and she had a refined, interesting little face, but it was not beautiful, and her father seemed to like to say so.

"I hope you will not talk in that way when Miss Paston comes, Anthony," said his wife, with much coldness. "It is so unsuitable, to say the least of it. I hope that Miss Paston's position and Janey's will be very different."

"Probably they will." Sir Anthony's clearly cut features, which had the color of old ivory or parchment, were set in a malicious smile which his wife thought very unpleasant. "Different, indeed! One, the daughter of the house, with a fortune of her own and a capital social position; the other, a mere nobody, a governess, perhaps, or dependent on charity for her daily bread." He seemed to gloat over the picture that he drew.

"Precisely," said Lady Kesterton. "That is quite

the state of the case. I don't know why it should amuse you."

"Suppose," said Sir Anthony, settling himself lazily in his chair, "suppose the positions were reversed; suppose it were Janey who had to earn her daily bread, and Elfrida to be the heiress—what then?"

"I cannot suppose anything so absurd, Anthony—you do not mean to say that this girl—"

"I mean to say nothing, my dear." He laughed as he spoke. "I was teasing you a little; that was all."

"I thought, perhaps," said Lady Kesterton, with well-controlled impatience, "that you had heard from Miss Paston's friends, and that she was richer than you expected. Though even then I fail to see how Janey's prospects would be affected."

"Janey's prospects are what they always were," said Sir Anthony, "and a good thing, too, for a girl with her plain little face, eh? Elfrida Paston's friends have not communicated with me yet."

His wife meditated for a moment or two. "Is there a chance of your hearing anything of that kind about her? Is it possible that she will have money some day?"

Sir Anthony also meditated before he replied, and eyed his wife with a coolly calculating and rather malicious expression of countenance. "You need not be afraid," he said at last. "She will never have anything but what she gets from us. Take your own way with her; I dare say you can hold your own, even if she does make reprisals some fine day."

"I do not in the least know what you mean, Sir Anthony," said Lady Kesterton, rising from her chair with a look of displeasure. "And I must say that I

think it very ill-bred to talk in riddles. I shall treat Miss Paston properly, and I hope she will behave properly to me. Her position in the house will be clearly defined, and I trust she will not be led into any danger of overstepping the lines. Come, children, it is time for you to go out."

She swept away with the same air of haughty displeasure, which, however, seemed to amuse Sir Anthony immensely. He laughed quietly for some time when she had gone. "It is a pity," he said to himself, "that there is nobody to enjoy the joke with me. I hardly meant to keep it up so long. After all, nobody suffers by it. I shall outlive the boy, and it matters very little for a girl. When she marries, or when she is one-and-twenty, perhaps—if she pleases me—I will make things straight. In the mean time, it is amusing to see my lady's manœuvres, and I won't let her go too far."

Sir Anthony was in the position of many men, who think that they can safely defy Fate, because they have no mortal disease and are not yet decrepit. He was a valetudinarian, it is true; but he calculated on a lease of life sufficient to enable him to carry out his plans; and perhaps, after all, he was as likely as most people to attain it.

The house was tolerably full of visitors, and others were expected on the day of Elfrida's return with Henry and Philip. She had been so long away from Kesterton that two or three trifles which passed unnoticed by her brother, and even by Mr. Winyates, impressed her unpleasantly. It was easy to account for the fact that the fly took them round to the garden door, for she knew that it was easier to carry Henry indoors by this entrance than by any other; but she was (a lit-

tle unreasonably) surprised to find that no one stepped forward to receive them; that their arrival attracted rather less interest than that of a new servant in the house. She had not expected to be welcomed by Sir Anthony or Lady Kesterton, but she had expected a little of the attention to which she had been for some years tolerably well accustomed, and a smiling housekeeper, or a willing house-maid would have been better than nobody. But Terry and the flyman had to carry the boxes up-stairs, and Philip helped to settle Henry comfortably upon his couch; and nobody appeared to help them. The day was wet and cold, but no fire had been lighted in the grate, and there were no signs of a meal. Mrs. Terry bustled about and began to put things in order; she seemed accustomed to waiting on herself and on Henry also, but Elfrida felt that the "home-coming," as Henry had cheerfully termed it, was decidedly chilly. The old parlor too looked very plain and shabby and comfortless to her eyes; the furniture was really in the last stage of dilapidation, and the few attempts at decoration were deplorably ugly. Elfrida turned to the window, but the view that used to be beautiful was obscured by driving rain and stormclouds, and she looked only on a scene of dripping and misty desolation.

Henry had been wheeled into his room for a quiet rest before tea, and Elfrida still stood at the window when Philip came back into the parlor. At the sight of her motionless figure, the face turned resolutely to the Park, the hands hanging at her sides, he suddenly realized some of the girl's feelings. He paused for a moment, then took a step toward the window. "I am afraid you find it cold and uncomfortable," he said.

She turned to him with a bright smile, but her eyes were full of tears. "Oh, you don't think I mind that?" she said. "It was of Henry I was thinking—he is so easily contented that it is a shame if he has not everything pleasant and nice about him."

"But I hope he is comfortable, generally," said Phil, with a touch of something like shame. "They cannot have known at what time to expect us, or they would have had things ready. I will ring and—"

"No, pray do not," she interposed, somewhat eagerly. "Dear old Terry will have everything ready in a few minutes. I will go and help her; I don't know why I am idling here. Don't let us keep you. I dare say you want to go to your own room, or down-stairs to tea. You see, I begin to remember the customs of the house."

"I will stay and have tea with you, if you will let me."

"No-no; you will be wanted."

"I am at nobody's beck and call: I am my own master. Let me stay, Elfie."

His voice sank to a tone of tenderness which was not altogether new to her. She had heard it several times during the last fortnight. It always fluttered her a little; she did not know whether to like it or not. Offended by it she could not possibly be. And in that moment of vague pain and humiliation it was sweet to her—sweet, also, the touch of his hand upon hers, the admiring gentleness with which his eyes rested upon her face.

"Stay, then," she said, with a little smile and a soft blush which made her lovelier than ever in his eyes; "but it is for Henry's sake, not for mine."

For whose sake soever, Philip found it very pleasant

to linger in the glow of the newly lighted fire, while Elfie went to and fro between the sitting-room and her own apartment, the door of which was in the passage opposite the baize door that led into the picturegallery.

Henry's rest was soon over, and he was wheeled back into the parlor when tea was ready. And then came a really merry little tea-party. Elfrida had quite recovered her spirits, and was kneeling before the fire toasting tea-cakes for Henry and Philip, the firelight dancing on her flushed cheeks and brilliant eyes, when a solemn knock came to the parlor door. And no sooner had she called out "Come in!" than a footman in very gorgeous array made his appearance with a solemn message.

"Lady Kesterton's compliments to Mr. Winyates, and tea is being served in the white droin'-room. And Lady Kesterton would be obliged to Miss Paston if she would go to her ladyship's boudore at 'alf-past five precisely."

Then he solemnly bowed and withdrew, leaving silence and something like dismay behind him. Philip muttered a word or two which Elfrida divined to have an objurgatory significance, but did not stir. Even Henry looked puzzled and vexed. Elfie was the first to recover herself. She burst into a merry, careless laugh.

"Go away, Mr. Winyates," she said. "You are not in your proper sphere. We may toast tea-cakes up here, and I am sure you daren't do that in the drawing-room, where you belong. Good-by. I shall see you again some time if I survive the interview in Lady Kesterton's boudoir."

"I am not going," said Philip calmly. "She does

not really want me—and if she does, she must do without me. My heart is set on those tea-cakes."

She laughed and resumed her toasting operations. But Henry still looked troubled.

"Perhaps there is somebody in the drawing-room that she wants you to meet, Phil. We can see you another day. You know, Elfie, you don't properly appreciate Phil's grandeur nowadays—"

She turned and gave Mr. Winyates a glance that thrilled that gentleman to the tips of his fingers in a very curious manner. It was half mocking, half tender, a little inquiring and a little affectionate; altogether somewhat coquettish. Possibly it put the final touch to work that was already begun; certainly it made Philip feel as if wild horses would not drag him away from the parlor in the west wing that afternoon. And Henry, with a pucker of unusual anxiety between his brows, went on—

"Since he has written books, he has become quite a literary lion, I can tell you! When he goes up to London, he is out to grand parties every night, and people can't make too much of him; no wonder Lady Kesterton wants him down-stairs. Phil, hadn't you better go?"

"Don't worry yourself, old chap. No, there's no necessity. I am not Lady Kesterton's lapdog, nor even her tame cat about the house. I shall e'en take the liberty of pleasing myself."

"If you do that, you will please us too," said Elfrida, as she put one of the cakes upon his plate. "But look at the time, somebody, and don't let me be too late for my appointment. Does Lady Kesterton want to examine me on my attainments, I wonder"—with a droll look—"or to offer me a post about her person?"

"She will do neither if you approach her in that frivolous spirit," said Philip, laughing. "Have you no awe and reverence about you, Elfrida?"

She shook her head. "Don't keep them in stock, or used them up long ago; I'm not sure which. But I'm a very good actress; I shall play my part well enough."

"I know you will say and do just the right thing," said Henry, looking at her admiringly.

"The right thing will be to be grateful for all her kindness, I suppose," said Elfrida, mimicking Lady Kesterton's tones so closely for a moment that Philip, who knew that she had spoken to Sir Anthony's wife at most two or three times, looked up surprised. Perhaps Elfrida mistook his surprise for another kind of feeling, for she suddenly changed her tone. "I am a wretch," she said, smoothing back her rather disordered hair, "and I don't mean what I say a bit. It's only naughtiness. Honestly and truly"—with a grave and rather sweet look—"I am grateful to Sir Anthony and Lady Kesterton for all that they have done for us. And I shall try to say so if I can."

"That's right, Elfie; I'm glad of that," said Henry simply.

She stooped to kiss him. "It is nearly half-past five. I must go. I wonder if I know the way!"

"I will go with you to the end of the picture-gallery, and show you which turn to take," said Philip. "Yes, it is time now."

She nodded gayly to Henry, and smiled at Philip in reply. "Come, then." And together they walked down the long dim gallery, where the pictured forms upon the walls gleamed at them like fantastic ghosts. At the further door, Philip showed her the turning that led to Lady Kesterton's boudoir.

"Wish me good luck," she said, lingering a little, and putting out her hand as if to say good-by. He took it in both his own.

"I do-most heartily. How cold your hand is, dear!"

"I am so frightened," she said, laughing rather nervously. "You wouldn't think it, but I am. If there is a person in the world of whom I am terribly afraid it is Lady Kesterton."

She drew her hand away, smiled again as if to reassure him, and then sped lightly and swiftly in the direction of Lady Kesterton's boudoir.

CHAPTER XVI.

ELFRIDA'S VOCATION.

"You are two minutes late," said Lady Kesterton, when she had extended her hand and given Elfrida the tips of two fingers for a moment. "I hope you are not in the habit of being unpunctual."

"No, I don't think I am," said Elfrida, quite clearly and simply, "but of course it will happen sometimes."

Lady Kesterton looked at her and did not speak. Another lady who was sitting in the great lounging-chair by the fireplace put up a long-handled double eye-glass and also looked. The movement attracted Elfrida's attention, which hitherto had been concentrated upon Lady Kesterton. She now glanced at the lady in the easy-chair.

Who was it? The face was vaguely familiar, and yet she knew no one with those swelling lines and contours, those superincumbent layers of fair white flesh, that face which had once been beautiful, but where now the beauty was half lost in positive fat. And yet that crown of elaborately dressed golden hair, the glance of the cold, smiling eyes—

Yes, she knew it now. It was Lady Beltane, the woman who, the servants had said, would one day be the ruin of Philip Winyates—who would not rest until she had broken Philip Winyates's heart. The remembrance sent a cold shudder of something like disgust

down the girl's spine. It suddenly seemed to her as if she had come to a house full of enemies; and she was nearer the truth than she knew.

"Won't you sit down?" said Lady Kesterton, dryly. She herself took a seat on the sofa, and Elfrida selected a plain high-backed chair for herself. The woman with the eye-glass was still surveying her. The hanging-lamp in the middle of the room had been lighted, and its rays fell full upon Elfrida's haughtily lifted head, her fine, spirited face, the slender figure in its well-fitting tweed gown. Elfrida had seldom looked better, though she was not aware of the fact. "I hope you had a pleasant time at Seaford," continued Lady Kesterton.

"Yes, thank you, a very pleasant time."

"Were you sorry to leave Madame Leroy's?"

"For some things; but I began to feel it was time I did something for myself, and relieved you and Sir Anthony of a great burden."

Elfrida had a prompt, decisive way of speaking which her listeners did not approve. Lady Kesterton answered coldly, "Exactly, I think it is time. I am glad you are so sensible. I have already formed a plan which will probably meet with your—your—approval." The word sounded satirical from Lady Kesterton's lips.

"Thank you, I hope so," said Elfrida. Which was not what she was expected to say at all.

"My plan," Lady Kesterton went on, as if unheeding that remark, "is one which I have carefully considered, and which is likely to be satisfactory in every way. You have been well educated, Miss Paston, and have, I hope, profited by your advantages. Of course, you ought to speak French or German like a native. My

friend, Lady Beltane"—she turned round to the splendid woman in the easy-chair; yes, she was splendid in her way, in the magnificent raiment of blue-green silk and plush which she called a tea-gown, with that gleaming coronet of golden hair—"has been a great deal abroad; you will not object to having a little conversation with her in French or German. We wish very much to hear your accent."

Elfrida knew well enough that she could not refuse or resent the request, but there was something restive in her which made her blood boil at the sound of Lady Kesterton's speech. Nevertheless, she answered courteously and quietly that she would do as Lady Kesterton desired, and immediately turned her face toward Lady Beltane and awaited the opening of the conversation.

Lady Beltane smiled a little, and looked at her with sleepy scrutiny. Then she began to ask questions in German about Elfrida's fortnight at Seaford. Elfrida answered accurately, although with reluctance. She seized almost immediately on the central motive of Lady Beltane's questions, which was, to ascertain how much time Philip Winyates had passed at Seaford, and on what terms of intimacy he stood with Elfrida herself. When she had got to know all that Elfrida would tell her, she smiled and glided gently into French. Lady Kesterton had not studied German. In French, Lady Beltane talked about Madame Craven's books, and the singing lessons that Elfrida had taken in Paris. And in a minute or two she ceased to talk, gave Lady Kesterton a little nod, and took up a novel that was lying by her chair. But although she ceased to talk, she kept eyeing Elfrida over the pages of her book with somewhat an excess of attention.

"Shall I sing to you too?" asked Elfrida, prepared to be amiable.

"No, thank you, singing will not be required," said Lady Kesterton. "No doubt you can play a little? Yes? Well, you wish to find a situation. Your great drawback is that you have no experience in teaching. I propose to you to acquire that experience in my house. My two children are in want of a governess—a nursery governess, of course, but one who can talk French and German to them; I offer you the post. When they require you no longer, you will be doubly valuable on account of the experience you will have gained and the recommendation that I should be able to give you."

Elfrida's cheek burned. If she had not resolved to be very wise and prudent, she would have rejected the proposal on the spot. For her old dislike of Lady Kesterton was upon her in full force. She not only disliked, but she distrusted and was afraid of her. What should she say? There was a moment's pause; and of the two who awaited her answer the one who felt the most real curiosity was Lady Beltane. Would this girl, who looked like a princess, condescend to be a little nursery governess under Lady Kesterton? If she did, then Lady Beltane would know what to think.

"I need hardly mention," Lady Kesterton went on, "that in this manner you will be able to see something of your brother, which, of course, under other circumstances you would be unable to do. When the children had gone to their nurses after tea, you would be able to sit with him in an evening, and to spend other portions of the day in his room. I should also pay you a certain sum every quarter for your dress and personal require-

ments—twenty-five pounds a year is usually considered ample for a young person in your position."

The latter part of this speech might have irritated Elfrida, if her mind had not been taken up with the thoughts of Henry. Yes, it would indeed be delightful to spend so much time with him. That consideration carried the day against all objections.

"Thank you, Lady Kesterton, I shall be very pleased to try," she said, and at that very moment Lady Beltane's book fell to the ground with a crash, almost as though she had pushed it from her with a gesture of impatience.

"Very well. Then you can begin to-morrow—or the day after, perhaps, so as to give you a day to unpack and get settled. You can keep your old bedroom in the west wing. I will arrange to-morrow about hours and so on. You will not have a great deal to do—only we want you in the evening sometimes to accompany a song or play dance-music in the drawing-room. You will not object to that?"

"Not at all."

"And one thing I must say—and I had better say at once. I trust that your brother's sitting-room in the west wing will not be made a rendezvous for idle people—especially for idle men in the house. You must put a stop to that yourself. One or two gentlemen have sometimes kindly gone to see the poor youth, but you will understand that will be unadvisable when you are there."

Elfrida looked at her without answering.

"I was very much shocked, for instance, to find that you had kept Mr. Winyates to tea to-night," said her ladyship severely. "I sent him a message; but I pre-

sume that you did not allow him to take advantage of it. Another time, I trust that that will not occur."

"I will remember what you wish," said Elfrida, with something of her brother's quiet simplicity.

"And I think that is all," said Lady Kesterton majestically.

"Not all for me," said Elfrida, rising from her seat with a slight tremulousness of voice and limb, proceeding from the consciousness of effort. "I have something to say, please, before I go. I wish to thank you—and Sir Anthony—for your great generosity. I owe my education to you. But that is not all. It is more to me that you have taken care of Henry—who will never be able to do anything in return—that you have made his life as easy as it can be made. I thank you for that—oh, a thousand times! And if I can do anything for you or yours, it shall be done. I owe you and Sir Anthony the best gratitude of my heart."

"I am glad that you have so much right feeling," said Lady Kesterton, with considerable grimness. "And I hope that you will do your work conscientiously. Perhaps your brother may be wanting you, so I will say good-night."

She was slightly propitiated in Elfrida's favor, in spite of her grimness of manner; but she did not think it well to encourage familiarity by offering her hand. So the girl made a graceful half-foreign little courtesy to her, and then to Lady Beltane, and went away from the boudoir feeling heartily thankful that the interview was over.

As soon as she was gone, Lady Beltane rose to an erect position in her chair, and spoke with shining eyes.

"You will repent taking that girl into the house, Eva. She is a dangerous young person."

"Dangerous?" said Lady Kesterton doubtfully. "She

spoke very properly."

"Oh, we can all speak properly when we choose," said Lady Beltane, with a short little laugh. "Don't you know why she accepted your offer? And, good heavens! why did you make it before you had consulted me again? She told me two or three things when I talked to her in German—things I wanted to know."

"What sort of things, Beatrice?"

"Oh, details about the fortnight at Seaford!" Beatrice drummed impatiently with her hand on the arm of
the chair. "Did you know—I certainly did not—that
Philip was there all the time? Of course you told me
he was going down with old Watson to see if she was
presentable, and so on; but you did not think that he
would stay a fortnight, did you?"

"I never trouble myself about Philip's doings," said Lady Kesterton coldly. "He comes and goes as he pleases. I wish he would take up his abode elsewhere, but he seems necessary to Anthony. Did you ask her then whether he was there?"

"I am not such a fool," said her cousin petulantly.
"I only made her talk. Mr. Winyates had taken her out boating, walking, driving. What they did with that crippled boy meanwhile I am sure I do not know. But Miss Paston's amusement had evidently depended on Philip; and it is because he is here, no doubt, that she consented to stay."

"But, my dear Beatrice, Philip would never marry a nobody like that girl Paston. . . Indeed, he does not seem inclined to marry at all. I wish he did." "Who talked of marrying? There may be flirtation and scandal without that."

"If there is the faintest breath of scandal, the girl goes out of my door at a moment's notice. We have had enough of that in the family."

"You will have to reckon with Sir Anthony before you turn that girl out of doors," said Beatrice, crossing her large, round white arms behind the golden head—a favorite attitude with her. "You know that very well. You should embroil him with her if you want to get rid of her. But, far from wanting to do that, you have taken the best means in the world for securing her,"

"I wish, Beatrice, you would not make unpleasant allusions to forgotten gossip. It does not concern Sir Anthony at all—my choice of a nursery governess. Please do not connect the names."

Beatrice laughed softly. "I won't—as you dislike it," she said. "But that girl will make mischief, and be troublesome—you will see. She is too good-looking not to attract notice."

"Do you think her good-looking? I don't see anything to admire in her."

"Men will, my dear. And, really, she has a graceful figure. She makes one feel old and unwieldy." And Lady Beltane rose slowly from her chair, and proceeded to examine herself critically in a long panel of looking-glass. "My complexion is not what it was," she said; "it wants tinting now and then; and I am much too fat to look well by the side of her: but in other respects, I can still claim to be called a handsome woman; don't you think so Eva?"

"Certainly I do-if you think it matters at your

age," said Lady Kesterton, in an acid tone. The remark would have made some women angry, but Beatrice only laughed. She was not of an irritable disposition, and her cousin's sour primness of tone merely amused her.

Meanwhile, Elfrida had flown back to the west wing, and found Philip still with her brother. They greeted her return with eager interest and curiosity, and in a few eager sentences she poured out her tale. But it produced a different effect from any she had anticipated. Philip looked aghast, and seriously annoyed: Henry glanced at him, and in his turn seemed doubtful.

"Why, don't you like the plan?" said Elfrida, suddenly catching herself up and glancing from one to the other. "Of course, it may not be pleasant in all respects, but I shall now be able to stay near Henry with a clear conscience. I could not have gone on living in the house in idleness, you know; and I think it is really a good plan for me to get some experience before I go out into the world."

"Shall you really like it, Elfie?" asked Henry; and there was something in his look and in his voice which startled his sister into the conviction that, in spite of his cheerfulness, he was not altogether blind to the disadvantages even of his own life at Kesterton.

"But it is too ridiculous to think of your turning nursery governess at all!" cried Philip. "With your talents—your accomplishments! Lady Kesterton is a good manager, I must say, but surely she has tried too high a flight this time. It is a complete waste of time for you."

"So you do not want to keep me here?" said Elfrida, with an arch turn of her neck. "Ah, well! it doesn't

matter, for I am not to see much more of you, Mr. Winyates. Lady Kesterton does not approve of your being here. I am not to toast tea-cakes for you again. So you are warned!"

What a child she was still, sometimes! There was not a trace of consciousness in her manner; it was touched only with girlish mischief and amusement. But it was just the manner that, in a beautiful girl, provokes a man to wish he could change it to earnestness-could rouse the dormant passion underneath that smiling exterior, and make the clear placid eyes grow dim and deep with emotion. It was thus that Philip felt as he looked at her. Then he came to himself with a violent little shock. How divided he was from her! But not, as Lady Kesterton would have thought, by any sense of social indifference; but by age, character, and, above all, by certain invisible fetters which Philip had forged for himself long ago, and strong as they were invisible. These, he said to himself, with sudden and irrepressible bitterness, were likely to keep him prisoner for at any rate the best years of his life.

"I am afraid I shall take my own way until you tell me to go," he said, smiling at her kindly—the spasm of longing, regret and pain carefully concealed.

But just then he could not stay much longer, for he had letters to write before the post went out, and so he bade the brother and sister good-night. He went down to dinner at the usual hour with a feeling of profound annoyance at his heart. He thought of Elfrida sitting with Henry in the shabby parlor up-stairs—or sitting alone when Henry had gone to bed—lonely, silent, possibly sad; and he fretted against the conventional laws which set him down at a richly furnished table,

gay with flowers and light and silver, at the side of a fashionable woman in grand array, while she—she whom he could almost have said he loved already—sat apart because she was only a nursery governess. Was she not beautiful, good, clever, as any woman of them all? True, her mother had been of lowly position in the world, but Sir Anthony had said that there was no stain upon Elfrida's birth. Why should she not be treated like any other young lady in the house?

"You look quite melancholy," Lady Beltane said in his ear. He had taken her in to dinner that evening, as there was some one present of more social importance to whom Sir Anthony had given his arm. "Anything wrong?"

"Nothing, thank you," he answered courteously, but with a touch of weariness in his tone.

"Where were you at tea-time? We heard you had arrived, but you were nowhere to be found."

"Lady Kesterton knew, for she sent me a message. I was in the west wing having tea with Miss Paston and her brother."

"She is a handsome girl—too handsome for her position," said Lady Beltane lazily. "But I hope you don't mean to get up a flirtation with her on that account."

"I get up a flirtation? Is it likely?" said Philip. Then, after a moment's pause, "It would have seemed to me kinder if Lady Kesterton, or yourself, had made some little effort to welcome Miss Paston on her arrival this afternoon. Nobody took the slightest notice of her coming. All the more reason, under those circumstances, for me to remain for a short time and try to make her forget how unwelcome she seemed to be."

"You were always a Don Quixote, Philip. But I don't quarrel with you on that account. I think it extremely sweet of you to be so kind."

"Do you?" he said, laughing. "But you know you might have saved me the necessity if you had liked!"

"There is no reason why you should not be kind," she said, almost in a whisper. "I can trust you."
But the whisper made Philip wince.

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CHAPTER XVII.

LADY BETTY'S YOUNG MAN.

Elfrida was summoned by a solemn message from Lady Kesterton to the school-room on the following morning and instructed as to the duties that would be required of her. They were not very onerous, as the children were not old enough to be emancipated from nursery management, and she was not asked to concern herself in any way with their toilet, or with their meals—except dinner, which she was to superintend.

"You can breakfast and have tea and supper with your brother, you know; that will be pleasant for you both," said Lady Kesterton, "and the nurse will take the children out in the afternoon, although you can go with them into the Park for an hour every morning; but I don't wish them to be over-tired with lessons. There are a few little things you can do for me in your spare time—notes to write, and so on. And I hope you mean to keep up your studies; it will never do to waste your time. I should advise you to read for some examination; people think so much more of certificated teachers nowadays."

Elfrida felt as if she were undergoing a cold douche. Her only comfort lay in making acquaintance with the children. She was naturally fond of children, and won Janey's heart at once.

Gerald was a little harder to attract, for he was a

spoilt child, and his nurse had been bemoaning his fate in having to submit to a governess. Hence his first interview with Elfrida was not reassuring.

Lady Kesterton's softer side showed itself in her love for her boy. She sat in a low chair in the cheerful little room that she meant to make into a school-room, and caressed him gently while he hid his face in her lap and refused to look at the stranger. Elfie, with one arm round Janey, who clung to her affectionately almost at once, was on her knees trying to attract his attention with a picture-book which Henry had bought.

"I see a picture of a tiger and an elephant," she was telling him, "and a puff-puff. Aren't you going to look at the puff-puff with me?"

Master Gerald kicked out his fat legs at her and half turned his face so as to speak comfortably.

"I don't like you—I won't look!"

"Won't you look, Gerald?" said his mother fondly. "See the nice pictures Miss Paston is showing you! You like pictures, you know!"

"Yes, I like pictures, but I don't like her," said the youthful Kesterton. "And I'm not going to do lessons with her."

"Oh, yes, Gerald must be good and do his lessons; and then Miss Paston will be kind to him and tell him pretty stories, and—"

"Don't want her old stories! She isn't a lady—nurse says so—and she shan't teach me," said this inconveniently indiscreet young gentleman.

"Gerald, Gerald!—" his mother was beginning, but she stopped short, for another figure had appeared upon the scene, and another voice made itself heard.

"What's this? What's this? Oh, it is you, is it?"

and Sir Anthony offered his hand to Elfrida in a limp, objectless kind of way.

Elfrida, rather glad of the interruption, had sprung to her feet; and Lady Kesterton also took the opportunity of rising. She moved away to some book-shelves, and Gerald was deprived of his support, but not at all fearful of the consequences of his impertinence. He stood on the hearth-rug surveying the tall figures of his father and his governess with baby insolence.

The sight of Sir Anthony, stooping in his gait, with gray mustache and yellowed complexion, was something of a shock to Elfrida. Her own dislike of him softened a little, and she returned his greeting with a grave smile and deference of manner which certainly differed very widely from the demeanor of her earlier youth.

Sir Anthony may have noticed the change or he may not; he was not a man whose moods were easy to fathom. After one careless yet scrutinizing glance, he turned to his little son with a terrific frown.

"What was that I heard you saying, sir? Some impertinence to Miss Paston? Have the goodness to behave yourself, or you'll be sorry for it some day."

"Don't be so violent, Sir Anthony," said his wife, half turning round. "He meant no harm."

And the child, emboldened by her defence, frowned as his father did, and muttered over again what he had said before.

"She shan't teach me: nurse says-"

"You impudent little beggar! Do you dare to tell me what your nurse says!" ejaculated Sir Anthony.

And he lifted his hand with a gesture so full of wrath that it suddenly brought back to Elfrida's mind the memory of another day when he had struck a child and had (she fully believed it) crippled him for life.

She forgot where she was and in whose presence she was speaking. She flung herself between the father and the child.

"Oh, don't strike him!" she cried, and then was dumb, quivering all over and very much aghast at her own audacity.

There was a moment's silence. Sir Anthony's face grew rigid and tense as he stared at her. He, too, remembered the scene of which she had been a witness; he knew the allusion that she made. Hitherto it had seemed to him possible that she did not remember it, but now there was no more doubt possible on that score. His hand dropped to his side; he turned round, and limply, passively, as it were, stumbled from the room.

"Really, Miss Paston!" said Lady Kesterton, in a tone of scathing indignation.

"I beg your pardon," Elfrida murmured, with flushing cheeks. "I did not mean—"

"I do not know what you meant, but your manner was most unsuitable. I hope and trust that for the future you will remember the respect that you owe to your employers—your master and mistress, to put the fact into plain terms. If ever I see such manifestation again—however, I do not wish to discuss it, especially before the children. We must remember that we have a duty to them, Miss Paston, as well as to ourselves. One expects some self-control, some courtesy of manner, from those persons to whom one commits the care of one's offspring. Gerald, come with me, dear; I want you."

She swept away, leading one of her offspring by the

hand; and Elfrida, dazed and humiliated, dropped into a chair and covered her face. She did not often cry, but this time she felt as if the tears must come. Truly, Lady Kesterton's rule promised to be a hard one. Could she support it long, even for Henry's sake?

A little warm hand came about her neck; a little soft cheek was laid against her shoulder.

"Don't cry," said Janey, wistfully. "I'll love you—don't cry."

"You little darling!" said Elfie, with a sob, and then she gathered the child into her arms, and laughed and cried together, to Janey's amazement.

They became the greatest of friends on the spur of the moment; and, indeed, when Elfrida knew her young charge a little better, she found an odd similarity between her own position as a child and that of Janey Kesterton. Janey was no favorite either with her parents or her nurses. There was something reserved, strange, delicate, in her nature: at the slightest hint of coldness her whole nature seemed to close up; at kindness, it opened like a flower. And the warm affections of Elfrida's heart, long restricted in their manifestations, poured themselves out upon Janey, so that the child throve and flourished apace, like a plant in the open air and sunshine.

But that was by and by. On this particular morning she soon recovered her cheerfulness, and took Janey back with her to her brother's room; for it was twelve o'clock, and she expected to find him established there upon his couch. To her surprise, the sound of voices and laughter came from the room. Opening the door, she found not only Henry, but an exceedingly pretty girl and an irreproachably attired young man.

The girl was little, slender, almost childish-looking, with a fair baby face and large, limpid, innocent blue eyes; an aureole of fair hair and the most delicious dimples in the world. Elfrida recognized her at once from Henry's previous description, but no introduction seemed to be required.

"Oh, here she is!" said the fair visitor. "I'm Betty Stormont, and you are Henry's Elfie. I always call you Henry's Elfie—you don't mind?"

"No, indeed, I don't mind," said Elfie, feeling her heart warm at once to the charming baby face and winning smile.

"I would have come yesterday, but my sister-in-law said that I should be in the way. I'm staying here, you know, so I often come to see Henry; and so does Lord Beaulieu." She turned and smiled at the young man in the background. "Lord Beaulieu—Miss Paston," she said, with the greatest nonchalance. "Now I have introduced you properly, although Beatrice does say that I haven't any manners."

Lord Beaulieu looked about twenty-four, and was a comely, well-groomed young fellow; manly, broadchested, moderately tall, brown-haired and gray-eyed. Perhaps the most noteworthy thing about him was his pleasant and candid expression; he looked like a man who could not do a mean thing to save his life. Elfrida liked his face; and he, Lionel—Lord Beaulieu—thought that he had never before seen anything so beautiful as hers. He did nothing but look at her for the remainder of his visit; and left the talking to Lady Betty, who seemed quite at home in Henry's room.

They did not go until it was quite lunch-time, and

then Lady Betty created some little embarrassment by taking it for granted that she should meet Elfrida in the dining-room.

"And then I hope you will go for a walk with me. We can arrange all that at lunch," she said, with her sunny, charming smile.

"Oh, but Elfie is going to lunch with me," said Henry, who was wonderfully quick-witted and ready in preventing awkwardnesses. "I have had so little of her lately, you know."

"And after to-day, I am going to dine with the children," said Elfrida, gayly. She would have no misconceptions on the subject. "And I shall spend the evenings with my brother, so I don't think you will see much of me down-stairs."

Lady Betty opened her eyes.

"Oh!" she said. "But—" And there she stopped.

"You were going to say, 'Won't you be very dull?'" said Henry, laughing. "It's not a compliment to me, Lady Betty. Elfie and I keep each other in spirits, I assure you."

"He must have been a good deal alone while I was away: I am not going to abandon him now," said Elfrida, going up to his couch, and putting her hand gently on her brother's arm.

"I'm sure—I—I wish I was Henry," broke from Lord Beaulieu's lips; and then he flushed hotly, with the

consciousness of having said a wrong thing.

"Oh, no, you don't! Think of my disabilities," said Henry quaintly, yet with something that was almost a touch of pathos in his voice. "You need not grudge me the few advantages I retain." "As if it was an advantage to have me to tease you!" ejaculated Elfrida; but although she laughed, there was a tear at the corner of her eye.

There was a curious momentary silence. Elfrida's hand was caressing her brother's arm. Henry lay still, with a bright flush upon his thin face and a dreamy look in his large blue eyes. Lady Betty and Lord Beaulieu stood side by side near the foot of the couch, looking at the brother and sister, and with the same thought in the mind of each.

It seemed to the two bright and prosperous young people a terrible thing that so little brightness and prosperity came to the lives of those other two. Beaulieu's pity was principally for Henry, with his crippled, useless limbs; but Betty, full of tenderness for Henry as she was, could better understand what Elfrida's life was about to be, and she pitied her almost more than her brother. For Henry had known nothing but deprivation all his life, and though his loss was greater, it was unlikely that he would ever suffer the disappointment and humiliation that would probably fall to Elfrida's lot-Elfrida, a girl as bright, as strong, as beautiful, as a girl could be. Little Lady Betty had a wise head and a womanly heart, for all her baby face; and there was a wonderful sweetness and sympathy in her eyes as she bid her friends good-by.

"By Jove!" said Beaulieu, who was still something of a school-boy in his expressions, as they walked rather soberly along the picture-gallery together. "By Jove!"

Lady Betty looked at him and nodded.

"You feel like that too!" she said. "I was wanting to make an exclamation of some kind, and I didn't know what to say."

"It makes me ashamed of being strong and well, somehow," said the young fellow, glancing down at his own goodly limbs.

"And yet I never knew any one so happy as he seems," said Betty softly.

They did not say more, but they felt all the comfort of mutual sympathy and understanding—a dangerous state of mind, as a general rule, for a young man and a young girl, but not so dangerous in the case of these two as it seemed. For they had known each other all their lives, and familiarity—it does not always breed contempt—brings about a certain carelessness of intercourse. So that Henry was rather beside the mark when he said, in answer to Elfrida's question respecting Lord Beaulieu:

"Oh, he's Lady Betty's young man!"

"How do you mean? Are they engaged?"

"No—I was really only joking. Philip hinted one day that it was what the families wished. You must not say anything about it."

"Of course not. Do they—do they—like each other, Henry?"

"How can I tell?" said Henry, laughing. "They squabble and slang each other a good bit now and then. But they are very good friends. He lives about five miles from here, you know, at Bewley Court. He is rather a friend of Philip's—that is how he has got into the way of coming here so much, especially as Philip is so much with the Beltanes."

"I did not know you had such a fund of information not to say gossip—about your neighbors, Harry."

"Well, it is something to do to get old Terry to talk gossip to me sometimes; and it does nobody any harm,"

"Of course not, dear. Did you ever see Lady Beltane?"

"Yes, she has been here once or twice. She looks very good-natured; but at the same time," said Henry thoughtfully, "I don't quite like her."

"And I—hate her," said Elfrida. But she could not tell him why.

She did not go for her walk with Lady Betty that afternoon—the girl told her afterward that she had been prevented by her hostess.

"Lady Kesterton had other plans," she said, with a shrug of her graceful shoulders. "You know, dear, Lady Kesterton and my sister-in-law are cousins, and, I suppose, very intimate friends. Whenever I want to go anywhere or do anything they take counsel together, and generally prevent me. But Sir Anthony and Mr. Winyates take my side sometimes, and then I do as I like. That was how I came to be allowed to visit Henry as much as I do; but there was a row royal about it at first."

"I should not have thought that you could hold your own in a row royal," said Elfrida, glancing at the peculiarly soft and gentle face.

"You don't know me yet," said Lady Betty. "I am the most wilful person in the world. So Beatrice says; and as she has had the charge of me for the last half dozen years, she ought to know."

Elfrida began to feel as if a new world were opening out about her. Although she did not see much of the other guests in the house, she learned a good deal of their doings from Lady Betty's casual talk.

She knew before long all about Mrs. Mainwaring and her tall, plain daughters, and the little peer whom they hoped to enslave; about Mr. and Mrs. Frank Lawrence and their respective flirtations; about the old Indian judge and his soldier son, whom everybody admired so immensely; and about the widower baronet and the rising young artist; and the pretty poetess, and the two or three odd young men and girls who came and went with bewildering rapidity.

Lord Beltane was in Scotland, and his wife was to stay here with Betty until he came back. Then Lord Beaulieu rode over very frequently, and other neighbors called or lunched or dined; and the house seemed to be full of jollity and mirth.

Lady Kesterton was not perhaps a genial hostess, but she had the knack of asking the right people together; and Sir Anthony played the courteous host to perfection when he was visible, which was not very often, for he lived chiefly in his library, cultivating classic literature and delicate health.

Philip Winyates fulfilled the duties of a son of the house, and fulfilled them admirably, in spite of the claims upon his time. He had resigned his landagency into the hands of an inferior, and lived a pleasant enough life, with literature by way of a profession. But Elfrida's keen eyes discovered sometimes that he looked weary—even troubled and perplexed. His eyes had a trick of softening when they fell upon her—but Elfie had taken a fancy to think that they softened in that way for every woman that he knew, and therefore—although she was mistaken—that look of his produced very little impression upon her.

No, there was some one else whose glances were of infinitely more importance to Elfrida. There was some one who brought her flowers, and sat persistently with

her brother for hours at a time; some one who seemed happy if she smiled on him, and who had no eyes now for any one but herself; some one whose coming made her heart beat wildly, her cheeks glow, her hands turn cold! Foolish Elfrida, not to remember how wide a gulf there lay between the Kestertons' nursery governess and Baron Beaulieu of Bewley Court.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Section 1

AFTER DINNER.

"Miss Paston, I should be glad if you would be in the drawing-room to-night after dinner. Miss Mainwaring wants some one to play her accompaniments."

Lady Kesterton did not wait for answers to her commands. She had entered the school-room to give this order, and she was out again before Elfrida had recovered from her surprise.

"Have you got a pretty frock to wear?" asked Janey anxiously, pausing in her occupation of adding up figures on a slate.

"Miss Paston hasn't got any pretty frocks; she's only our governess," growled Master Gerald, who was still a particularly rude and troublesome boy when, as just now, he had met with difficulties in his reading-lesson.

"Go on with your lessons, my dear," said Elfrida, "and never mind my personal appearance. If I go down in an old sack, it won't matter to you, will it?" and she laughed so merrily that even Gerald was beguiled into an uncomprehending chuckle.

That was the best of Elfrida—she could be stormy at times, with the rest of us, but when she had no immediate cause for depression she could also be brilliantly, infectiously gay; you could not resist the spell of her charming mirth. It swept you away in a full tide of enjoyment. The same spirit was observable in Henry,

though in him it was tempered by illness and confinement; but it welled up within him as in her—a love of healthful mirth and innocent laughter, which seemed as natural to them as song to birds or perfume to summer flowers.

In spite of her laughing answer to the children's remarks, however, Miss Elfrida was somewhat disquieted about her dress. She went in her perplexity to Terry, and was surprised to see the old woman's face wrinkle up into lines of unaccustomed pleasure and amusement.

"Why, Terry," said the girl, half ruefully, half comically, "I don't—for once—see anything to laugh at! I have only my cotton frocks and the old striped muslin, and a black silk, you know—besides serge and such like. I suppose I must put on the black silk and a fichu—the very sign and emblem of 'genteel poverty!"

"We'll see about your black silk, Miss Elfie; you shall put it on if you've a mind to," said Terry, laughing. "But there's one of your dresses that might do instead. You wait here and I'll show you what I've been doing to it."

"I suppose it's the old striped muslin," said Elfrida to her brother, with a shrug of the graceful shoulders. She turned to the fire and stood looking down into it, while Henry smiled to himself. "It's been cleaned and washed and darned, and let down and retrimmed about a hundred times already. I suppose she has run on a new bit of lace and a blue ribbon, and thinks it looks 'as good as new.' My opinion is that the black silk would be better, after all. Why, Terry, what's that?"

For Terry, entering mysteriously, carried in her arms, like a baby, a soft white dress which Elfrida had certainly never seen before. It was of the finest white

India muslin, trimmed sparingly with Valenciennes lace and knots of white ribbon, made with narrow tucks and pleatings like a baby's robe—the ideal dress for a young girl, with its mixture of simplicity and elegance. Elfrida stood amazed.

"Terry—Terry—that delicious frock isn't for me! Why, where did it come from? It's perfectly lovely. It can't have been Lady Kesterton—"

"Lady Kesterton! No, indeed!" said Terry, with a fine scorn. "As if she would trouble what you wore. It's Master Henry, my dear, that's been thinking of you, and it's him you've got to thank. I made it myself, but it's Master Henry's thought and choice and getting, and my Lady Betty lent me a pattern that she said would suit."

"You, Harry dear! But why did you do it? How could you, you dear, naughty boy? And I don't understand—"

"It is easy enough to understand," said Henry, smiling. "You know, I always have an allowance, and I never need to spend it, so I began to think some time ago whether I could not get you anything you would like. And Terry took me into her confidence on the subject of your wardrobe directly you were asked to come here. So one day she went over to Eastbourne and got this stuff for you; and she has made it into a dress since she came back. Lady Betty understands these things, and she tells me it is just the right thing for you."

"How good you are, Henry! How good you are!" cried the girl, sinking down on her knees beside him and pressing her soft lips to his cheek. "You are the best brother that ever lived! And just to think of a

boy like you knowing so exactly what I should like! I think it is wonderful."

"Go and try it on," said Henry, with a laugh. "I'm glad I've chosen a thing you like, anyhow. But go and try it, and come back when you are dressed up."

Elfrida did as he wished. She ran off to her room, followed by the smiling Terry, while Henry picked up a book, knowing—in the instinctive way in which he seemed to know so many things, the finer nerves in him being strung by his illness to an almost dangerous pitch of sensibility—that it would probably be quite half an hour before she returned. And he was right; it was about forty minutes before she came, but she excused herself by saying that some little alterations had had to be made by Terry.

"And now do I look nice? Do I do justice to your taste?" she said, dropping him a courtesy.

"To my thinking, you are lovely," said Henry. And the smile of satisfaction on his face was sweeter to Elfrida than that of any other admirer.

The dress certainly suited her very well. The distinction of her face and head, the delicacy and finish of her traits, the fine pallor of her complexion, melting into a faint peach-like bloom on the oval of her cheeks, and a brighter red on her curved lips, were all set off to the best advantage by the snowy whiteness of her frock and its air of simple refinement.

She was young and fresh enough to wear almost child-ishly simple attire, and she had no temptation to spoil the effect with colored ornaments of any kind, for she had none to wear. Elfrida's wardrobe had always been sparingly provided with pretty things. But now she was perfectly satisfied with what she had got.

When evening came she dressed once more, and showed herself in all her bravery to her brother before she bade him good-night. Then she slipped down to the big drawing-room, establishing herself near the grand piano, as she deemed it her duty to do. She had brought some music with her, but she put it out of sight, not wishing to attract more attention than necessary; and took up an illustrated book by way of occupying herself until the ladies should return from the dining-room.

But she had no particular inclination to look at pictures. She was absorbed in noting the changes in the drawing-rooms since she saw them last. They were very beautifully decorated and furnished now; but she half regretted the dim, old-fashioned splendors of an early day, when she used to steal into the room with Eliza and lose herself in admiration of the Bohemian glass, cut-glass chandeliers, and flowery carpet of the olden time. Well, the effect was prettier now, she was obliged to confess.

Then she fell to wondering who would be there that night; her friend, Lady Betty, of course, and Philip Winyates—they would be kind and nice to her; perhaps even Lord Beaulieu. But he, Elfie reflected sadly, would probably not be able, even if he cared, to give her any of his attention.

To the other people who would be present she felt absolutely indifferent; even the thought of Sir Anthony, whom she had seen only on that one unfortunate occasion in the school-room; and she had ceased to be much concerned at Lady Kesterton's strictures. But when the hum and buzz from the dining-room suddenly ceased, and a door was opened in the distance, and the

soft frou-frou of silk was heard along the corridor, she certainly did turn a little nervous at the thought of meeting with all these strangers, and heartily wished herself, for the moment, safe back with Henry in the west wing.

She was so much hidden by the grand piano that at first she passed unobserved. Then Lady Betty, detaching herself from the group of ladies, floated up to her like a summer cloud on an azure sky—all white and blue with a blue that matched her eyes.

"So you have come," she said. "And you are absotutely charming! How do you like my taste? It is mine and Henry's, you know, and I think you are simply perfect!"

"It was so kind of you to help," said Elfrida, in the low tone proper for such confidences. "And wasn't it good of Henry? I don't know what I should have done without it to-night."

"It is quite a success," said Lady Betty approvingly, "and I know who'll be charmed. But I won't tell you beforehand. Find out! There's Beatrice, for one, eying you through her glass as if she would like to eat you. Ah, she's coming over here now."

And Lady Beltane, in a white brocade train, with a petticoat of yellow satin, and a very small corsage of satin and brocade, showing as much of her white shoulders, arms and bosom as it could conveniently, be made to do, swept up to Elfrida at that moment and offered her two fingers in a languid, indifferent way. But all the time her eye was fixed upon the details of the girl's toilet; she was looking at her dusky masses of hair drawn up from the warm white of her neck and forehead, at the baby bodice, edged with delicate lace, of her

muslin gown, at the long white silk mittens which were all Elfrida had by way of covering her exquisitely moulded arms and hands.

"White muslin, lace and ribbons!" Lady Beltane was saying to herself, "and yet the effect is undeniable. The dress is made exactly like Betty's silk from Liberty's. I wonder if the girl had the impudence to pry into Betty's wardrobe and copy it!"

But while she made these remarks to herself, she was slowly dropping out heavy, affable sentences about the weather and the piano, and the music that lay upon it, as if she wanted to be friendly.

Presently Lady Kesterton came up and introduced her in a casual sort of way to Miss Mainwaring, whose accompaniments she was to play, and after a little more idle chatter and consumption of coffee, Elfrida was told, rather than asked—to play something.

She complied at once. Her playing was good, crisp, clear, and expressive, but not absolutely remarkable—more calculated to give quiet pleasure to the real lovers of classical music than to produce the effect of "fireworks."

Lady Kesterton was rather pleased at this. The finished style of the young musician, trained in a German school, did not appeal to the ear; she thought it a little dull. And as she had not particularly wished Elfrida to excite admiration, she was satisfied. She had been first a trifle afraid about the excellent musical training which she knew that the girl had received.

When Elfrida's music had made itself heard, the men began to flock in from the dining-room. Philip, rather to Elfie's surprise, did not come to the piano all at once. He spoke to Lady Beltane and stood looking down at her and replying to her low-toned remarks uttered behind her great white feather fan, as she lounged, after her usual indolent fashion, in a big easy-chair. Once or twice he glanced impatiently away from her. Elfrida, knowing by instinct every subtle change in his face, saw that he wanted to get away; but Lady Beltane chained him inexorably to her side.

Somebody else, however, was not disposed to absent himself. Lord Beaulieu came up, his blue eyes alight, his honest, healthy cheek a little flushed by pleasure and surprise.

"So glad to see you, Miss Paston! I hope you're going to give us some music. I know how fond Henry is of your singing."

"Oh, thanks, I'm not going to sing," said Elfrida, smiling at him a little shyly. "I am going to play Miss Mainwaring's accompaniments."

Lord Beaulieu gave a swift glance round and then lowered his brown head confidentially.

"She can't sing a bit, let me tell you, Miss Paston; I would a great deal rather hear you; now you will give us a song by and by, won't you?"

How to resist that coaxing tone Elfrida hardly knew. But she had no time to reply, for Lady Kesterton was bearing down upon her.

"Miss Mainwaring is ready now," she said. "Have you the music, Miss Paston?"

And Elfie, blushing red as a rose at the tone of reproof, hunted out Miss Mainwaring's music, and became aware, as she placed it on the music-rack, that Sir Anthony had turned round and was contemplating her and stroking his gray mustache with an air of amused and deliberate scrutiny. He looked more good-natured than

usual, Elfrida thought, and evening attire was becoming to him—giving him the old air of a gentleman and a scholar instead of the querulous invalid which he was too easily tempted to assume; but his continued attention made her a little nervous and called a rather pretty color into her usually pale face.

She duly played Miss Mainwaring's accompaniments, however; and the guests were edified by having to listen to a very small and reedy voice, which had indeed been well trained, but which no training could ever make pleasant. She sang twice, and then settled down in a low chair with the evident conviction that she had done her duty.

Elfrida wondered whether she ought to go now that her work was done. A whist party was being organized in one part of the room, a round game in another. There seemed no need of her services.

But Sir Anthony was addressing her in his suavest, most polished way.

"Good-evening, Miss Paston. I am glad that you have forsaken your retreat up-stairs in our favor this evening. I hear that you sing; will you not be so kind as to indulge us?"

Elfrida knew that it was not for her to refuse, although Lady Kesterton was darting an angry glance in her direction. And she was perhaps not sorry to have "a chance," as she put it half mockingly to herself. She placed a song upon the piano.

"May I turn over for you?" said an eager voice in her ear.

"Do you know your notes?" said Elfrida, without turning her head, which showed that she recognized the voice. "I should think I did. Why, I play the 'cello a little. I'm awfully fond of music!"

"Very well," said Elfie, graciously; and Beaulieu straightened himself up, and looked as proud as though he had an army to command.

Elfrida had not many English songs, and on the whole preferred German ones; so on this occasion she followed her own tastes and sang a well-known and very melodious Schubert song, which she was quite sure that any cultured audience could not resist. And in fact her voice and her singing took the company by storm—as far as so unemotional and well-bred a company could be taken by storm at all. She had a soprano voice of peculiarly sweet and searching quality, particularly in the upper register, where her notes came forth with a bird-like spontaneity which never failed to charm her hearers. There was something pathetic in it, toosomething which made the heart swell and the eye grow dim. It was a voice to soften as well as to attract. And it was absolutely new: nobody had suspected her of such a power; it took the hearers by surprise. At its close half a dozen of the listeners closed up round the piano with thanks and compliments. These, however, were chiefly men.

Lady Kesterton and Lady Beltane exchanged glances and sat still; Mrs. Mainwaring and her daughter were visibly disconcerted. Philip was not allowed to stir from Beatrice's side. But Lady Betty and Lord Beaulieu, as well as some other guests, were in ecstasies.

"Oh, don't get up yet, don't get up; you must sing something more!" said one of the visitors, a very excitable little man, reputed to be a musical critic for one of the society papers. He had at once asked for and ob-

tained an introduction from Lady Betty to the fair songstress. "Pray, permit me: you have something here that's rather nice—although it is English. Won't you oblige us by singing that?"

"Please do, Miss Paston," murmured Beaulieu; and to this request, as well as to a slow "Pray, oblige us" from Sir Anthony, Elfrida gave heed. This time it was one of Taubert's songs with English words, "My Darling is so Fair," which contains a charming passage for a sweet well-trained soprano like hers. It was perhaps even more successful, because more comprehensible, than the other.

"Perhaps you will come and have a game now?" said Lady Kesterton's voice at the close to one of the circle of admiring men. "We want two or three of you to play—come, Lord Beaulieu, we can't do without you, or Mr. Pemberton either. We can have some more music by and by."

She managed to disperse the little circle by her authoritative tones; and nobody heard her say to Elfrida:

"You need not take up the whole evening with your singing, you know. You had better slip away now; you will not be wanted."

It was a blow to Elfrida. Lord Beaulieu had just conveyed to her his earnest desire that she would come and play Nap and bank with him; he wished she could bank with him always, he informed her, somewhat prematurely perhaps. And she was just wondering whether she dared remain, when Lady Kesterton's snub was murmured into her ear.

She obeyed, of course. She slipped out by the folding doors of the two drawing-rooms, making her escape by a side door. But her eyes had filled with hot, child-

ish, smarting tears. She was disappointed, and she was also humiliated. It was hard to be sent away when the fun was beginning, as if she were not worthy to sit down to the same card-table with Lady Betty and Lord Beaulieu.

"Where are you going, Miss Paston? You promised to be my partner," said the bright, boyish voice that she was already beginning to know so well. "Aren't you coming back?"

Beaulieu had observed her disappearance, and had contrived to go out by the other door and meet her in the hall.

She shook her head and smiled, but he noticed the bright tear-drop upon her eyelashes.

"Is it that old—was it Lady Kesterton?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter! I shouldn't be fit for my work if I were up late to-night. Good-by, Lord Beaulieu, I must go."

"You say it doesn't matter! Aren't you sorry? Wouldn't you like to have had that game?"

"Well, yes, rather-"

"And—with me? You wouldn't have minded being my partner, would you?"

"Oh, no," said Elfrida, looking down.

"Don't you think we should get on very well—as partners?" said Beaulieu, approaching her. There was not a touch of disrespect or familiarity in his manner; but Elfrida was vaguely frightened at it, and hearing the click of the door-handle, she flew precipitately down the corridor.

And Beaulieu turned to find Lady Beltane regarding him from the drawing-room door with a curiously malicious (and as Beaulieu thought) unpleasant smile.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HEIRESS OF THE FUTURE.

"You must have Miss Paston down again," said Sir Anthony to his wife next day, during his occasional morning lounge in her boudoir. "Indeed, I would have her every night, if I were you; her singing is uncommonly attractive."

"I shall not have her down again!" said Lady Kesterton sharply.

"Indeed? Why do you deprive yourself of such valuable help?"

"The girl is a flirt, a born coquette, a brazen-faced little creature, who gives herself airs about her voice," Lady Kesterton burst out with sudden vehemence. "I will not have her in my drawing-room to make eyes at men and try to attract their attention. It was scandalous, the way she behaved."

Sir Anthony laughed.

"Pardon me," he said gently, "but for once I must say that you are mistaken. She was in my sight from the moment we came into the room to the moment that she quitted it. I observed absolutely nothing wrong with her manners."

"Men are very easy to hoodwink," said Lady Kesterton contemptuously.

"Pardon me again. I am not easy to hoodwink."

"Well, in spite of your penetration, Anthony, you do

not know all that went on. Lady Beltane happened to go into the hall just after Miss Paston went out, and there was Lord Beaulieu talking to her—almost with his arm round her—disgraceful!"

"I saw that Beaulieu admired her a good deal," said Sir Anthony. There was a peculiarly grim smile upon his face.

"Considering the plans of the family respecting him, I think he might have better taste in this house. He is as good as—well, almost—engaged to Betty Stormont."

"Beaulieu is a free agent. He will never propose by proxy. He is a dolt, but he is a good fellow. I always liked Lionel."

"Then of course you will do your best to help me in preventing this flirtation from becoming an entanglement," said his wife, in her severest voice.

"Why do you call it an entanglement?"

Lady Kesterton gazed at him in despair.

"Beaulieu and a nursery governess! A girl who has no family, no fortune; for all I know, no name! A scandal—a disgrace!"

"You are in error, my dear," said her husband coldly, "and you are on the road to making a very great mistake. I know the girl's history, if you do not; and I say, advisedly, that Elfrida has name, family, and fortune sufficient to satisfy even Beaulieu's friends, unless they insist upon a title, which of course she hasn't got. So if those facts are likely to affect your estimate of the girl, by all means rectify it in good time."

Lady Kesterton actually turned pale as she continued to look at him.

"Anthony, what-what do you mean?" she cried.

"I mean exactly what I have said."

"Do you mean that she is-of good birth?"

"Certainly."

He had never said so much before.

"Anthony, tell me who she is," said Lady Kesterton, with white lips.

He looked at her and smiled.

"That is my secret, my dear. You will know some day; but not just now."

"At least, tell me she is not-"

"I shall tell you nothing, and I do not wish to be questioned. When I want you to know, I shall speak without questioning. In the mean time you had better be civil to the girl."

His wife kept silence for a few minutes.

"If she is as you say, why did you let me make her the children's governess?"

"It will do her no harm. You need not begin to treat her as an heiress—there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip—and she may get nothing, after all. Just go on as usual. Be decently civil."

Lady Kesterton needed the admonition. She certainly would not have been "decently civil" without it. As it was, she reserved the scolding which she had at first intended to administer to Elfrida on the subject of her dress, manners, conversation, and style of singing, and contented herself merely with a touch more stiffness and coldness to the girl than usual. Sir Anthony's communication had both startled and frightened her. It revived an old fear of hers that Elfrida and Henry might prove to be Sir Anthony's legitimate children, in which case her own cherished Gerald and Janey would be completely dispossessed. Of late she had forgotten this fear. But it rose up, gaunt and grisly now, before

her eyes. If that could be the possible explanation of the case, no hatred of hers against Elfrida and her brother could be too great.

Directly after her conference with Sir Anthony she went to Lady Beltane's room—Lady Beltane had enlightened her the night before as to what she had seen in the hall—and entertained her with a recital of what her husband had said.

"I am growing quite frightened about that girl; she seems destined to upset everything," she said. "You were quite right, Beatrice; she is a very dangerous young woman."

"I always said so," Beatrice rejoined contemptuously; "and it is my opinion that she will be more dangerous to me than to you."

"What do you mean? How can she be that? If she were to take Janey's place, and that wretched crippled boy were the eldest—"

"My dear Eva, don't be ridiculous! If they were his legitimate children, Sir Anthony would never have treated them as he has done. Of course everybody has always thought that they were his children, but that he was not properly married to the mother. It is not likely that they are anything else."

"But he says they are-well-born."

"Then they are not his children at all, but his friend's —as he has always said. Don't be so absurd, Eva. The friend was a man of better position than we have supposed, that's all, and has left the children a fortune. Sir Anthony is right enough. It's no use bullying the girl—nor is it any use so changing your manner to her so that she or other people shall suspect that you know something more about her."

"That is true, Beatrice; you have plenty of common sense."

"Of course I have; I am not such a fool as people take me for," said Beatrice a little bitterly. "I am old enough to have learned wisdom, I suppose."

She went to her mirror as she spoke, and looked at herself with a sort of disgust. The morning light was not favorable to her complexion, wonderful though it sometimes appeared at night.

Eva, looking at her dispassionately, thought how clumsy Beatrice's figure looked in the richly tinted dressing-gown that fell from her throat to her feet in voluminous folds of changeful silk and gold; her own slim, flat-chested form in its light tweed gown was much more to her taste.

"What did you mean by saying that Miss Paston was more dangerous to you than to me?" she demanded presently.

Lady Beltane turned away from the looking-glass with a flash in her eye.

"She is dangerous in every way to me and to my family. What does the girl mean by carrying off men's attention from everybody else? She has not yet had time to win their hearts, I think; but her thoughts? We have no claim on Beaulieu, but he was always intended to marry Betty Stormont, as you know. Beltane will be furious if he finds that's off. And what girl of spirit will put up with a man whom she hears of as embracing pretty governesses in the hall?"

"Isn't that going a little too far? Do you think he absolutely—embraced her?" said Lady Kesterton, with a shocked air.

"If not, he came very near it. And I've been ques-

tioning Betty this morning. It seems that Beaulieu always goes to the west wing when he comes, on pretence of visiting Henry Paston. The young people meet together there in the most indecorous way."

"That went on before Elfrida came back," said Eva,

who had spasmodic fits of justice now and then.

"Yes, but it needn't go on now. The boy was supposed to be lonely; he has his sister now. As it is, Beaulieu—and Betty, too, for the matter of that—spend hours, I believe, in that west wing."

"You must tell Betty to keep away!"

"As if I had such a lot of authority over Betty! Why, you know the child has done as she liked ever since she was born! Besides, that would not drive Beaulieu away—and he goes to see the Paston girl now, whatever he did before. And then there is Philip—Philip!"

"She was always a pet of Philip's."

"Yes but he never used to talk about her. Last night he raved—raved—simply raved about that girl and her voice!"

"Silly of him to do that to you," said Lady Kesterton dryly. "But really, Beatrice, don't you think it is a pity to pin Philip so closely to your side? It was all very well when he was a boy; but he is three or four and thirty now, and you—well, you know what you are—a very well-preserved woman, but not, of course, in your first youth. If you could but grasp that fact, and let Philip amuse himself elsewhere."

"Philip is welcome to amuse himself elsewhere if he chooses," said Lady Beltane. She spoke coolly, but her eyes flashed again with a dangerous light. "I certainly never wished him to remain single for my sake. But if he marries, I do hope it will be with somebody

respectable—not with a girl of such doubtful antecedents as hers."

Lady Kesterton was silent: she was turning over many plans and suggestions in her mind.

"I wonder," she said at last, "whether we could get anything out of old Watson! He is a great fool, although honest as the day; and even Anthony says he is not the man he used to be. We might try him."

"Try, by all means," said Beatrice, "but I don't think that he will say a word more than your husband allows him to."

Eva was determined, however, not to lose a chance. She sat down at once and wrote a note to Mr. Watson asking him to call upon her. This note she sent into the town by a special messenger; but the man, after some delay, returned to tell her that Mr. Watson was not at his office, and that he was reported to be ill. Lady Kesterton was at first rather disposed to question this statement; but unfortunately it was confirmed by further testimony. And two days later, news was brought to the Park of the death of John Watson, solicitor, from an unusually short and sudden attack of pneumonia.

Among those who mourned his loss, Elfrida and Henry Paston were to be numbered. Ever since their earliest days they had memories of Mr. Watson. When they were little children he had been reserved and silent, but seemed to look at them with kindly interest, which, as they grew up, developed into a kind of paternal affection. It was he who practically acted as their guardian; paid them their pocket-money, arranged with Terry for their expenses. He had always been fond of Henry; and since he had seen Elfrida at

Seaford, he had become one of her warmest admirers. The brother and sister grieved sincerely for his death, and felt themselves more alone than ever.

Lady Kesterton thought it very absurd that Miss Paston should have cried on hearing the news until the state of her eyes made it impossible for her to come down that night. She had grown almost accustomed to having Elfrida in the drawing-room after dinner. She looked after her pretty sharply, and scolded her afterward if her demeanor had not been rigid enough to satisfy Lady Kesterton's views of propriety; but the possibility of her developing some day into an independent young woman of fortune made Lady Kesterton hold her hand.

"Where's Miss Paston?" said Sir Anthony to his wife, in the course of the evening. He spoke in an undertone.

"Every one is asking me that question," Lady Kesterton replied irritably. "Crying in the west wing over old Mr. Watson's death—though heaven knows why!"

Sir Anthony smiled, pulled his long mustache, and moved away.

He was not very sorry that Watson was dead. His death left Sir Anthony tolerably free to do as he pleased. There was no one likely to remonstrate with him now on the subject of his conduct, past, present, or to come. Mr. Watson now and then permitted himself that liberty. There was a parson, Sir Anthony thought, a man who might do mischief if he were alive; but he had some reason to think that this man, too, was dead. At any rate, he had disappeared for some time from the Clergy List.

Sir Anthony Kesterton had never desired to do any

permanent injury to those with whom he was connected; but he was, above all things, selfish and indolent. He hated "scenes;" he hated trouble and criticism and change. He had always prided himself on "never explaining anything.' Things generally explained themselves. Unfortunately, as he was beginning to realize, things sometimes explained themselves in a wrong way, which needed later on to be set right. He began to foresee the speedy necessity of explanations in a certain direction, and it had irritated him to think that Watson might demand them. None of Watson's successors should ever have the power over him that Watson had had.

Thus musing, he quietly left the drawing-room and betook himself to the west-wing parlor—a place which he seldom visited. He had a fancy to see whether Lady Kesterton had been speaking the truth or not. Perhaps she had made Elfrida cry by scolding her for some trivial misdemeanor. Perhaps this grief for old Watson was a mere pretence. He had the curiosity to know the truth.

The door of the parlor was ajar. There seemed to be no light but that of the fire, and indeed, as he soon discovered, the sitting-room was empty. He walked softly into the room, and at once distinguished a murmur of voices from the adjoining apartment. Henry had gone to bed, and Elfrida was sitting beside him. Sir Anthony hesitated for a moment only; then he drew near to the door of communication and listened.

The first sound that fell upon his ear was a long sobbing sigh. Then Henry's voice.

"Don't be so grieved, sweetest. If we both believe what we have been taught all our lives, we know that he has gone home," "That is all very well to say, dear; but all I can think of is what we have lost."

"Isn't that rather selfish, Elfie?"

"I am selfish," said Elfrida.

"No, that you are not. See how good you are to me!"

"That is nothing. You are my brother—part of myself. We have very few people to care for, and we should be simply unnatural if we did not love one another. But Mr. Watson was a real friend, and we have not so many friends that we can afford to lose them. Oh, yes, I am selfish; although I should be just as sorry for his death if he had never been able to help us in any way. Yet I know I am all the *more* sorry because we are helpless and poor and dependent, and he is not here to help us."

Henry made a little sound of dissent, and for a minute or two there was silence. Then the boy said gently:

"Well, I see a way out of that too."

"You always do, dear. What is your way?"

"If I were well and strong, Elfie, not a poor, helpless cripple as I am—yes, yes, I will speak!—you would not feel yourself so lonely and dependent, would you? Well, then, in reality you are simply grieving for me and my loss; for if I were as well and strong as you, neither of us would look on Mr. Watson's death as anything but a personal misfortune: we should not think of it as affecting our destinies."

"I suppose so!" said Elfrida, a little dubiously.

"Then don't you see that your grief is entirely unselfish?"

"No, I don't, you dear boy. I believe that you are very clever at sophisticating the truth when you want to make me happier. But after all—I don't want you to

think I am sorry only because we shall miss his kind offices. No, it is because I shall miss the man—the dear, kindly, funny little man, who used to try to be so pompous, and invariably broke down in the attempt. He was more like a father to us than anybody we ever knew, don't you think?"

"Yes—perhaps," said Henry, with some hesitation. Then, half below his breath, "except Sir Anthony."

The unseen listener moved involuntarily. What on earth did the boy mean?

"Sir Anthony!" ejaculated Elfrida.

"Yes, Sir Anthony. He has done such a tremendous lot for me, Elfie. And I always liked him."

"Even although he struck you?"

"He did not mean to hurt me—it is nonsense to say he did. A child may easily be pushed down and accidentally hurt. Sir Anthony would never have done such a thing as to hurt me on purpose. You confuse the cause, if that was the cause, and its effects."

"I don't care!" said Elfie, decidedly. "He does not seem to me at all like a father—anybody's father, least of all yours; and I do not like him, and never shall. I liked old Mr. Watson much better."

"But I like her," thought Sir Anthony, as he moved away, and went through the long picture-gallery to the drawing-room. "And I like the boy too. Curious: for I once thought that I never should. Have I not done them injury enough? Suppose I settle it all and put the matter straight? I should have done it before if Henry had not been a cripple. It is Elfrida's birthday in a few weeks, I know: suppose I put her into her rightful position when she is twenty-one—upon her birthday night?"

CHAPTER XX.

IN MASQUERADE.

"WHAT can it be?" said Elfrida.

She was surveying with curiosity and disquiet a letter which had just been brought to her. It came from Mr. Watson's office in Southborough, but she did not know any one who would be likely to write to her in that place.

"Open it," said Henry, "and see."

She tore open the big, business-like envelope, and found that it contained another envelope, and a note from the late Mr. Watson's son, stating that the inclosure had been found in his father's desk.

The inclosure—a sealed envelope—bore this super-scription:

To be given, at my death, to Miss Elfrida Paston, now resident at Kesterton Park, Kesterton, Southshire.

Then followed a date—more than ten years before. Elfrida's fingers trembled as she opened it. Was it possible that she was about to learn some secret that had been kept from her for all these years?

No: the inclosed letter was simple and non-committal enough. It contained merely these words:

If Elfrida Paston should, after my death, fall into any great perplexity or trouble, I advise her to seek out the Reverend Austin White, formerly curate of St. George's, Bloomsbury, now Vicar of St. Fillans-in-the-

South, Bishopsgate Street, London, E. C. It is very possible that he would be of great use to her. It is my earnest request, however, that this intimation be kept secret from any but Elfrida Paston and her brother Henry.

These lines were simply signed with the writer's name.

"What a curious thing." said Elfrida, in a low voice.
"Who can this Mr. White be?"

"A clergyman—and that is all we are meant to know," Henry answered. A flush rose in his pale cheek; he looked anxiously at his sister. "Don't let it trouble you, Elfie. Put it away and forget it, until you are, as he says, in any perplexity or trouble; and let us hope that you never will be."

"But does it concern only me? Why was it addressed to me?"

"Because, dear, ten years ago nobody thought that I should live to my present age. Mr. Watson thought that you would be the only Paston left."

"Ah, Paston, Paston!" cried Elfrida, rising to her feet. "What a simple little name it is, and how little we know about it! Do you remember Lady Kesterton's question—'One of the Somersetshire Pastons?' No, we are not Somersetshire nor any other sort of Pastons: we have no relations, no history. We are practically waifs and strays."

"We are to know more some day," said her brother, with the look of gentle patience which always had an effect on her, even in her bitterest words. "Sir Anthony has told me so. Be patient, Elfie: perhaps there is nothing very good to know."

"I would rather know the worst than be kept in igno-

rance. Henry, were there not some relations of ours once in the village?—some people called Derrick, to whom mother belonged? What has become of them?"

"They have all left the place and gone to Norfolk, where they came from, I believe. I asked Terry once to find out. The rumor in the village is that Sir Anthony paid them to go."

"Ah, then, there is something which we might have been told," said the girl, looking at him wistfully; "and Sir Anthony was afraid that we should hear it. I know now."

She moved away to put the letter into a safe place, and Henry was left alone, meditating on the words that had been said. He was still alone when a hurried, imperative little knock came to the sitting-room door, and in answer to his "Come in" Lady Betty made her appearance.

"Is Elfie here? Oh, I have such news—such delightful news for her!"

"Not for me too?"

"Oh, yes, I know you will be interested. But it is more interesting to frivolous girls than to men," said Betty, in her coaxing, flattering way, as she stood smiling blithely, with—all the same—a touch of the softest pity in her eyes. "Therefore I ought to tell it to Elfie first."

"It is a party or a new frock," said Henry, as if speaking confidentially to the wall. Then, turning again to Lady Betty: "Elfie is in her room. She will be here directly. But you can't wait until she comes, you know. Relieve your heart and tell me now."

"Well, you're right, I can't wait, and I won't. Sir Anthony has promised to give a fancy ball. Lady Kesterton tried to make him say no; but he insisted. And it is to be while we are here—three weeks on Thursday: that will be the eleventh of December. We are going to stay all that time!"

"The eleventh?" said Henry. "Ah, that is the day before Elfrida's birthday."

"Is it really? How delightful! It is all the more appropriate. Because, you know, I am rather a favorite of Sir Anthony's, and I always flatter myself that I can wheedle him out of anything; so on this occasion I got him to show me some dear old books in the library, and then I got him to talk about the ball and about Elfrida. I said, you know, how pretty she was, and what a shame it was that she should not get any fun, and he quite agreed with me. So we laid a little plot—"

"You did, you mean."

"Well, I did; but he is my accomplice. And Elfie is to come to the ball, and I may arrange her dress for her: only he wants her to be dressed like the Lady Elfrida in the picture-gallery. I have often fancied I saw a sort of resemblance, and he says he sees it too. And here is the key of the old press in the corner of the picture-gallery. He says he believes that Lady Elfrida's very dress is in that press, and Elfie may wear it if she pleases."

She ran off to find her friend, dangling the key on one of her slender fingers as she ran; and Henry, again left alone, knitted his brows with a sensation, half of bewilderment, half of fear.

Was the matter quite so simple as it seemed to Lady Betty? Was there any reason why that particular day the eve of Elfrida's twenty-first birthday—should have been chosen for a grand ball in which she was to appear in the costume of the celebrated Kesterton beauty of the time when George the Third was king? Sir Anthony was not a man to concern himself about trifles, save for an exceedingly good reason. Why should he aid and abet Lady Betty Stormont in tricking Elfie out in borrowed raiment, and by so doing probably bring down Lady Kesterton's heaviest wrath upon her head? There seemed to Henry, in spite of his habit of looking on the sunniest side of things, something sinister, something ominous, in this mode of proceeding. It was, of course, easily conceivable that Sir Anthony did not know that the twelfth of December was Elfrida's birthday, and that the date of the ball had nothing to do with her at all; but Henry's fine and sensitive organization had begun to perceive the presence of a threatening something in the air—a mystery, a catastrophe, he knew not what, but something vaguely amiss.

It troubled him because he had found more than once that it had been followed by disaster. A chronic invalid is sometimes more conscious than healthy people of the approach of disease, or death, or misfortune. And perhaps Henry had inherited a touch of the clair-voyant faculty which his grandmother was rumored to have brought in ancient days almost to the point of divination and prophecy.

Elfrida came in presently with flushed cheeks and shining eyes: she had had her conference with Betty, and no premonitions of evil disturbed her mind. She was young, pretty, ready for enjoyment: and the prospect of appearing, beautifully dressed, at a ball was truly alluring to her.

[&]quot;Betty has told you?" she said.

"Yes." He forced himself to smile. "When are you going to investigate the treasures of the press?"

"This afternoon. It is Saturday, you know. Betty and I will dress up and exhibit ourselves for your benefit."

"Undisturbed by vagrant men," commented Henry, with a rather mischievous look. "Even Philip and his bosom friend have gone to the *fête*, I suppose."

"I suppose so. At least I don't know what you mean by Philip's bosom friend," said Elfie, rather consciously.

But she did not stay to hear the name: she knew well enough that it was Lord Beaulieu whom Henry meant.

"What stores of things for 'dressing up!'" sighed Lady Betty that afternoon, as Terry and Elfrida helped her to ransack the two oak chests of old, forgotten garments which were stowed away in dim corners of the picture-gallery. "One would think they had never been routed out for fifty years or more."

"Dear heart, but they are musty!" said the somewhat disgusted Terry. "And they'll want airing before you young ladies put them on."

"They are strong of camphor and lavender, and sandal-wood, and all sorts of nice things," said Elfrida.
"I don't mind the mustiness one bit. What a delicious brocade! Look at it, how it shimmers! Now if I could wear that!"

"Wait a minute," said Lady Betty, with rather an intent look at the brocade. "Let me look at something here—yes, it is as I thought. Elfie, that's the very identical pattern: you have hit on Lady Elfrida's own brocade!"

Elfrida ran to the picture: it was one that startled and repelled her at first, and then drew her with a singular charm. The likeness that she recognized, without fully comprehending, had a curious effect upon her. But at this moment she looked at the brocade rather than at the delicate, listening face; and then she smiled with pleasure.

"Yes," she said, in rather a low voice, "it is the very same."

"And here is some lace," said Lady Betty, eagerly.

"Now run away to your own room and try the things on, Elfie; that is the brocade; and here—oh, here is the rose-colored satin petticoat. You will be quite perfect if the dress fits. I must come with you, and Terry too."

And so it happened that as the dusk of the autumnal day was gathering, Philip Winyates, entering the picture-gallery on his way to visit Henry, found himself confronted by a bravely clad fantastic figure that looked as if it had stepped straight out of the frame of the picture near which it stood. It was Elfrida, who had been left there for a minute while Lady Betty ran back to her room for some forgotten ornament; and the old-fashioned dress so much increased her likeness to the painted Lady Elfrida of 1785 that Philip could not repress a sudden start.

"Is it really you, Elfrida?"

"Me, or a ghost," she answered, laughing rather tremulously; for there was something in the likeness between herself and the dead woman whose clothes she wore which rather weighed upon her nerves. "What do you think of it?"

"It is curiously like," murmured Philip, with a strange sort of apprehension in his eyes.

"Yes, is it not? Of course the dress makes one look so like the picture. You see we found it all: the rose-

colored petticoat and the brocade sacque—cream-colored, embroidered with differently shaded flowers and rose-colored knots of ribbon. Lady Betty is trying to find some pearls for me. You see *she* wears a pearl necklace in the picture; and then I shall be—perfect."

"You are that already," Philip whispered.

There was a queer little thrill of admiration, of longing, of suppressed emotion, in his voice. Perhaps Elfrida did not notice it: perhaps she refused to attend; at any rate, she went on tranquilly:

"And of course I shall have to have my hair powdered. It is for the fancy ball, you know; but you must not tell anybody, Mr. Winyates: it is to be a secret. Have the other people come back yet? If so, I must go away."

"No, nobody will be at home for the next hour or two. I left early. But where did you get the dress, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Sir Anthony wishes me to wear it. He sent the key of the oak chest by Lady Betty, to see if we could find it." She turned again to the picture and contemplated it steadily. Perhaps she did not altogether want to observe the expression of utter bewilderment which was making itself visible on Philip's features. "You should go as Montrose, or Strafford, or Charles I.," she went on quietly. "You have their cast of countenance."

"I hope I am not quite so unfortunate as they," he said, with a laugh.

He was trying to recover from his surprise. She glanced at him slightly.

"There are many ways of being unfortunate," she said, pulling at one of her lace frills, and wondering where Betty could be; "and you have certainly a rather tragic kind of face—"

"Belied by my history."

"I don't know." She gave him a keener look than before. "You know there are tragedies in the lives of most people—failures of hope, of aspiration and effort—which are not written out in plain hand. But you bear more traces of a history than most people."

"And pray what is my failure, or my tragedy?" said

Philip, a little piqued.

"How can I tell? Effort, I should think," she answered, with a smile.

"Effort? Failure of effort? I do not at all understand."

"Of course not. I was only talking nonsense. What should I know about it? I was only thinking that life must be very quiet in this little country place, and that you must have suffered—or perhaps failed—forgive me for saying so—before you could have allowed yourself to drift so listlessly down the stream."

A dull red flush rose to Philip's brow as he listened. How was it that this child had laid her finger unerringly on the one sore spot in his life, the failure of his earlier aspirations, the gradual content with the languor of idleness? And how had it come about?

"You are right," he said, with some emotion, "more right than you suspect. I have been—I am—a failure in the world. I have written a little, but I have not done half what I might have done, and I have worked for my own pleasure only. You can understand, you can sympathize. I have never met with a woman before—"

"Betty!" cried Elfrida, catching sight of a figure flying past the door that led to her room, "I am here: come!"

"In a moment," said a clear, distinct voice. "I broke the string and had to pick all the beads up. Wait where you are."

"No, I will come to you," said Elfrida hurriedly, but as she turned to pick up her train, Philip laid his hand softly upon her wrist.

"One moment, Elfrida. I did not mean to offend you. But will you not listen to me?"

She paused and looked at him. She had always liked his face: she had thought it refined, melancholy, gentle. She had also thought it of late somewhat irresolute and weak; but there was a new light in his soft brown eyes, a new expression of determination about the set of his lips, which intimidated her a little.

"Why should I listen just now?" she said. "I am thinking about balls—and chiffons. It is not the time for a discussion on character or fortune."

"But there are some things that will not be left unsaid. There are some things which a woman must know in the long run: why should they not be told at once? Elfrida, I love you—I love you with my whole heart. Could you not—some day—be happy as my wife?"

Had a bombshell exploded at Elfrida's feet—had the earth opened and threatened to swallow her up—she could not have been much more surprised.

The instinct by which a mature woman can tell whether a man admires her long before he has put his admiration into words is not fully developed all at once, and Elfrida was as yet unused to love-making. Philip Winyates had always seemed old to her—a man who used to teach her and scold her in her baby days—it was absurd to think of his asking her to be his wife. In

her perturbation of mind, she began to laugh hurriedly, but the laughter had within it a sound of tears.

"It is impossible, Philip," she said. "Oh, quite impossible!"

"But why, Elfrida? Could you not care for me?"

"Oh, not in that way. As a friend, yes; but nothing else."

"Why say so in that decided way? Think a little; take time. I don't want to hurry you. Is it because I have been so idle? Have done so little in the world? With you to inspire me, Elfrida, I feel as if I could conquer anything."

"Oh, but it is no use my thinking or taking time, or anything of that sort," said Elfrida, in her outspoken fashion. "I could never care for you. And besides, I cannot believe—it is not possible—"

"Ah, don't say that you don't believe in my love for you."

"But how can I? You have known me for a few weeks practically—that is all—and—may I say everything?—you have cared for some one else for a great many years—at least, if all the stories that I have heard are true. Your old love cannot have died so suddenly."

"It has been dead for years. Oh, believe that, Elfie, at any rate. I know whom you mean. I have kept up an old friendship, and that is all. I ceased to love her many years ago—when she gave me up to marry a richer man."

She gave him a quick, searching look; then shook her head sadly.

"I am glad that you do not care for her. I was told you did—still. But that makes no difference to me.

I do not love you; and if I do not love you, how can I be your wife?"

"You might learn to love me, Elfie. Will you not try?"

She sighed and shook her head.

"No," she said softly, "I cannot even promise that. I can promise nothing but to be your friend."

"Here are the pearls," cried Betty, entering with a somewhat whirlwind effect upon the scene. "Put them on, Elfie: and now—now look at her, Mr. Winyates, and say if she is not absolutely perfect!"

CHAPTER XXI.

PHILIP'S RESOLVE.

FRIENDSHIP is a very good thing in its way, but it is a very poor substitute for love. So, at least, Philip reflected as he passed out of Elfrida's presence and made his way to the outer air, where he knew that he could think over his position with greater security from interruption than in the house. For during the recent irruption of visitors Phil's freedom of action had been somewhat interfered with. Sir Anthony had exacted from him more companionship than usual. He liked to have some one with whom he could rail against the fashions and follies of the world when he was in an ill-humor; and of late he had been very captious and apparently very dependent on Phil's society. Then, when he came out of the library, there would be riding parties in which he was expected to join, or entertainments that he had to help in organizing; for, as a matter of fact, and as he reflected with considerable self-scorn, he occupied the position of an elder son, without an elder son's privileges or prospects. His earlier duties, as agent and manager of the estate, had gradually slipped into other hands: his time was taken up by social duties, by dilettante conversations with Sir Anthony, by his own literary work. Sir Anthony gave him an income, and made his life easy for him; but—he almost started as he thought of it-ten years of his manhood had drifted by and left him as he was when he began—a mere hanger-on, after all; a man without a position, without a future, and with an easy, but not a particularly enjoyable life. And for what? What had he gained?

He went out in the gathering twilight, and trod the country roads in the dark, damp November air, through which a fine and penetrating rain had begun to fall, with a sensation of mingled discomfort and savage pleasure. It was something new to him to feel discontented with his surroundings, and there was a certain relief to be found in bodily exertion, even of a rather disagreeable kind. To plunge through the mud of a country road in late autumn, with rain beating in your face, and a raw wind blowing which makes you cold in spite of your overcoat with its turned-up collar, and the comparatively warm refuge of your coat pockets for your benumbed hands, is perhaps rather a dreary kind of satisfaction; but when you are in an aggrieved and conscience-stricken state of mind, it is not a bad way of working off your vexation of spirit. Wind, rain, and cold seemed rather pleasant than otherwise to Philip, as he meditated on his own shortcomings, and on Elfrida's refusal to listen to his proposal. The world had never seemed so black to him since the day when Beatrice Larose became Lady Beltane—a day which he ever since considered the gloomiest of his life.

He began to look back to the years that were gone, and to wonder whether he might not have won Elfrida's heart if he had spent them differently—a vain conjecture, but one which people are apt to make in similar circumstances. Her criticism of him seemed to have flashed new light over all the past. He thought of his depression when Beatrice jilted him, and it now seemed

to him unmanly. It was this depression which had caused him to accept Sir Anthony's offer, and to sink into the anomalous position which he now filled. "Little better than that of a maître d'hôtel," he said to himself bitterly, "with the duties of secretary and footman superadded. No wonder Elfrida despises me! She lives in this house, too, but she does good honest work for her living, while I loiter—and dangle—and feast—and flirt—bah! I am sick of it all." And he strode on furiously through the darkness.

The remembrance of his literary work, successful as it had been, brought him no comfort. He knew that it was not as good as it might have been. The listlessness and luxury of his life had affected the quality of his work. He might have done better. It gave him no satisfaction to think of the praise which his work had received, when he remembered the defects of which he perhaps alone was conscious.

Yes, he had wasted his life. If he had manfully refused Sir Anthony's proposals, gone to London, and battled for himself as other men had done, he might by this time have achieved independence and, possibly, success. He would not even have lost the chance of making Elfrida's acquaintance or of befriending Henry, for he could have spent his holidays at Kesterton Park, and seen the brother and sister at their well-earned times of relaxation. "She would have respected me then," he said to himself, with an odd constriction of the throat. "She would not have said that I looked like a man who had failed—God help me! I have failed, and what is there left to live for now?"

Was it yet too late to retrieve the past? Little by little, as he pursued his way, he pictured to himself

some quiet room in London, where, faring hardly, and toiling from morn to night, he might reinstate himself in his own self-respect, and join the crowd of busy workers, whose lives, he humbly owned to himself, were worthier than his own. And yet, in the world's eyes, his life had been blameless enough. He had spent his days with Sir Anthony in scholarly, refined seclusion, or in the enjoyment of simple and innocent country pleasures. What was there with which others could find fault? There was just this—though it had been left for Elfrida's courage and straightforwardness to point it out—the life was not one of effort and achievement, but of repose; and to a man of Philip's age and Philip's ability it was therefore an unworthy and effeminate life.

Looking back to the beginnings of things, Philip tried to trace the influences that had been at work upon his mind. The present result seemed to him to be due chiefly to his relations with Lady Beltane. Her treatment of him had stunned and unnerved him, but he was recovering from the shock, and was beginning to think of new work when she first came to the Park, shortly after Sir Anthony's marriage with Miss Lester. He remembered that he had at first treated her coldly, but that she had at once striven to bring him once more to her feet. And she had succeeded—to a certain extent. He thought of the laughter with which she had treated his higher ideals, and of the imperiousness with which she had bidden him remain at Kesterton Park when he once mooted the point of a change of residence. She did not want him too near her, Phil said, to himself, with a bitter laugh. She flattered him by saying that he might lead a far more distinguished,

refined, and scholarly life at Kesterton than in town; and that she wanted him to be different from other men -not drawn into the vortex of London society and spoilt by the coarse admiration of London critics. He had thought these sentiments admirable at the time. And then she had shown him how charming it was that he should be at Kesterton Park when she came to visit her cousin, and that it was easier to see much of him when he was there than if he lived in chambers in some smoky, dusty part of Bloomsbury (for instance); and that he would be very foolish (besides displeasing her very much) if he gave up his present position for any nonsensical reasons about liberty and independence. So Philip had remained at Kesterton Park and grown used to a life which was easy and luxurious and unexacting, but not adapted for the furtherance of higher aims.

And what had he got in return? Merely the privilege of being Lady Beltane's accredited cavaliere servente, of being tacitly considered her especial attendant, and allowed to escort her on her walks and drives when she was at Kesterton. He knew that a great deal lay between himself and Beatrice that was best unspoken: it seemed to him an unnecessarily dangerous thing to disregard the barriers which law and morality and convention had alike set up. There had been days when he did not think so-when he had fretted against the limitations of his lot and hers, and had striven to make her set them at defiance, in thought if not in fact. Lady Beltane had been provokingly discreet. It was not that her conscience was more sensitive than his-indeed, she would have gone far greater lengths had he but encouraged her to do so; but she had no wish to give up or even to compromise her position; and she was exceedingly careful in guarding against the tongue of slander. So careful indeed was she, that Philip had come, not unreasonably, to the conclusion that she did not feel any affection for him at all. And hence it did not cause him much anxiety, when he reflected, in the course of that winter evening's walk, that his old "friendship" with Lady Beltane must now be broken off. It was—in the ordinary sense of the word—innocent enough; but there was something in it that was not compatible with the love of a fresh young girl like Elfrida.

True, Elfrida had refused him. But he did not despair for all that. His heart rose up with an irrepressible hopefulness as he thought of her downcast, blushing face, her tremulous, agitated words. He felt almost certain that he could win her-if there was no one else in the way. And surely there could not be anybody else. Whom had she seen? With whom could she fall in love? He never thought seriously of Lord Beaulieu, although the young peer's admiration for Elfrida hadseveral times been commented on in his hearing; but he deemed it out of the question that Beaulieu would make love to "a nobody" like Elfie, when Lady Betty Stormont was in the house. What, though she despised him now, and thought that he did not live as manly and strenuous a life as a man ought to do? He would show her what he was capable of for her sake. He would gain her admiration and her love-at any rate he would strive to be worthy of both.

And so thinking, he turned back to Kesterton, feeling much the better for this long communion with himself.

What he did not reckon upon was a woman's love of power. Lady Beltane might perhaps think lightly of his love, but she was not very likely to be content to have no influence on his life. It was in his estimate of her character, and of the characteristics of the sex at large, that Philip was mistaken.

He was too late for dinner, and made the lateness of the hour and the dampness of his clothes an excuse for not appearing in the drawing-room. Lights, chatter, music, card-games seemed odious to him. He began to put his papers in order, and to wonder what Sir Anthony would say when he resigned his position at the Park.

It happened, on the morning after that long and somewhat dreary evening walk, he was sent for by Sir Anthony about nine o'clock, in order to talk over the terms of a business-letter which Philip had undertaken to write.

The discussion lasted only a short time, but it served as an introduction to what Phil wanted to say. He had been summoned to Sir Anthony's dressing-room, where the baronet, in gorgeous Oriental garb, sat before a glowing fire, sipping chocolate and glancing now and then at a newspaper. Sir Anthony was seldom seen in public before noon, and—perhaps all the more for that reason—he liked an early chat with Philip when Phil was disengaged. Generally, however, Phil was in a hurry to be off. On this occasion Sir Anthony noticed that he lingered, after the business talk was done, as if he had still something to say.

Sir Anthony never asked questions. He only noticed with interest, and even with amusement, the fact that Phil was restless, unquiet, and apparently irresolute.

He wandered about the room somewhat aimlessly, examined the ornaments on the mantel-piece and the pictures on the walls. Sir Anthony's dressing-room was a very ornate apartment. But Phil did not seem to know very well what he was talking about, and lapsed into silences which were decidedly incomprehensible.

"I have something to say," he remarked at last, with some abruptness.

"Ah? I am always glad to hear your observations, my dear Phil," said the baronet, suavely, "but don't you think you might make them sitting down almost as well as standing?"

Phil laughed a little and took a chair.

"I stood," he said frankly, "because I felt some embarrassment. You have been always very good to me, and I do not want to do anything that you would not approve of, but—at the same time—"

"At the same time there is something that you want to do which I shall not like, you mean?"

"I suppose I do mean that. Perhaps you will not dislike the proposition after all. I have made up my mind that I ought not to lead the aimless and idle life that I am leading now. I want to go up to London."

"There is nothing to prevent you. Take a month."

"You misunderstand me. I want to give up my post here and live in London—permanently."

There was a moment's pause. Sir Anthony's nostrils and lips whitened a little, as they always did when he was in anger. But it was in a perfectly smooth and passionless voice that he said at last—

"And may I ask how you intend to live when you get to London? I was not aware that you had any great source of income apart from the salary I give you."

Philip's face flushed. There was something slightly offensive in Sir Anthony's intonation. He also paused for a moment before he replied.

"I intend to work, sir. I believe that I can get literary work to do. I have had offers of the kind at different times. Hitherto I have declined them all, but I think that they might be open to me still."

"Oh, no doubt fame and fortune are before you," said Sir Anthony, sardonically. "Go by all means. But I thought you enough of a man to know that London streets are not paved with gold. For a man between thirty and forty to begin life over again as a literary hack seems to me a poor business. However, you must take your own way. I must say that I think your life here need be neither idle nor aimless. But that is your own lookout."

Philip was surprised at the amount of feeling that had crept into his cousin's voice. Sir Anthony was not in the habit of displaying the softer emotions. But it was true that he had always been fond, in his way, of Philip Winyates; and the younger man's conscience smote him as he remembered the many ways in which Sir Anthony had been good to him ever since his boyish days.

"Cousin Anthony," he said, using an old form of address which had not passed his lips for many years, "I owe all that has been best and pleasantest in my life to you. I would not think of leaving you if I could be of any use. But you know that of late the management of things has drifted out of my hands. I have almost no duties—no occupation, save to make myself agreeable to your guests. Don't you see that it is time I did something for myself? I am in a most anomalous

position here, and I cannot but believe that if you think the matter over—"

"There, that will do," said Sir Anthony peevishly.

"I made no objection, did I? If I think you a fool, I suppose I am entitled to my own opinion. I should be better satisfied if you gave me your real reason instead of trying to cloak it in an absurd farrage of words about literary work and a career."

Philip was startled. "I do not quite know what you mean, sir," he said, with some hesitation.

"Don't play the hypocrite, Phil," said his cousin, almost angrily. "Do you suppose I don't see what this all amounts to? Of course a woman is at the bottom of it—she always is. Only I thought you had more common-sense."

"I don't altogether deny it," said Philip, with a heightened color. "A woman has influenced me. But the influence is for good and not for ill—"

He was interrupted by Sir Anthony's harsh, cackling laugh. "He!he! Very good. Very good indeed. For good, not for ill. Well, it is the first time that my Lady Beltane ever exerted herself to such purpose—"

"What!" cried Phil. "Who—what on earth do you mean? Lady Beltane has had nothing to say to this."

Sir Anthony stopped laughing and looked at him. "Nothing?"

"She knows nothing about it. I have not exchanged a word with her on the subject. She has nothing to do with my movements."

"Times are changed, then. There was a day— But come, tell me who the woman is," said Sir Anthony, in a more good-humored tone, "and then I shall perhaps understand matters better. Who is the fair unknown?"

"It is-Elfrida," said Phil.

"Elfrida—Elfr— Good heavens, Phil, you don't mean that?"

"I do, indeed," said Philip, warmly. "For I love her, and I want to work for her sake, in the hope of winning her. Is there anything remarkable in it"—with gathering wrath—"that you look so concerned and so—so—amazed?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," said Sir Anthony, falling back in his chair, and beginning to laugh softly in a manner that showed him to be very much amused. "I was only thinking that when Lady Beltane knew of this new turn of events there would be the devil to pay, that's all."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST CHANCE.

Philip left his cousin's presence in a somewhat irritated frame of mind. There was no more serious conversation between them. Sir Anthony continued to laugh in a manner which annoyed Phil, who could not see any particular reason for amusement; and it was not to be wondered at that he quitted the dressing-room abruptly at last, and with a brow which betokened offence. Sir Anthony was, however, in no way disturbed by Philip's ill-humor. He resumed the perusal of his newspaper and the consumption of his chocolate; but ceased these occupations every now and then in order to chuckle softly to himself. There was evidently something in the state of the case which appealed very strongly to the sense of the ludicrous.

He was still laughing when Lady Kesterton entered the room on her way downstairs. She always visited him before breakfast, inquired after his health, and imprinted a frosty conjugal kiss upon his brow. "You seem amused," she said to him, as he looked up at her with the cynical smile lifting his gray mustache and giving life to his lustreless dark gray eyes.

"I am exceedingly amused," said Sir Anthony. "I have been the recipient of a lover's confidences this morning, and it is not often that I find myself in so interesting a position. I feel positively flattered."

"Has your valet been confiding in you?" said Lady Kesterton, in a slightly contemptuous tone.

"A person much superior to my valet—Philip Winyates."

"Philip Winyates!" Lady Kesterton raised her eyebrows and looked out of the window.

"You will never guess the object of his affections," said her husband, enjoying her perplexity. "Have we not believed that Phil's heart was bespoken—that his love was as that of the moth for the star, and so on? Prepare yourself for a shock, my dear Eva. And perhaps you had better prepare Lady Beltane's mind as well."

"Lady Beltane has nothing to do with Mr. Winyates' affairs," said Lady Kesterton with dignity.

"No, indeed she has not—now. He has fallen in love with Elfrida Paston, so Beatrice may wear the willow."

"I think it is hardly good taste to allude to Beatrice in that way," said his wife frigidly. "I cannot see the use of recalling an old, boy and girl, foolish love affair, which she has quite forgotten. And whether she has forgotten it or not, her conduct has always been perfectly correct."

"Oh, quite so," said Sir Anthony, taking up his newspaper again. "No doubt she will be delighted. I would tell her about it at once if I were you."

"That girl, Miss Paston, is a very designing creature," said Lady Kesterton "But I should not be sorry to see her married to Philip—"

"Because you think you would then be rid of them both, eh?" said Sir Anthony dryly. "You are mistaken there. If she married Philip, the two would probably continue to live in the house as they do now.

But set your mind at rest; I do not mean to promote the marriage. I have other views."

"Other views? For whom?"

"For Elfrida, my dear. Yes, I interest myself a good deal in her fortunes, as you know. But it is no use discussing the matter at this early hour in the day. Had you not better go down to breakfast?"

Lady Kesterton retired in some discomfiture; and Sir Anthony remained alone to laugh over his newspaper as if the news that he had imparted were of the most singularly diverting kind.

Phil was in the breakfast-room when Lady Kesterton came down, and she noticed at once that he looked vexed and anxious, and also that he kept away from Beatrice. Lady Beltane was not often downstairs so early; and as she talked and laughed her cousin examined her critically, as one woman will often examine her dearest friend or nearest relation, and came to the conclusion that Beatrice made a mistake in showing herself in the unbecoming morning light. The wintry sunshine found out all the weak points in Lady Beltane's appearance—the reddened and roughened skin, the crow's-feet round the eyes, the wrinkles in her brow. If Philip were really transferring his affections to a younger woman he would not be easily lured back to Beatrice's side, especially when Beatrice was ageing so fast and looked so terribly plain.

Then she wondered whether she had better say anything to her on the subject or not. She was very well aware that Beatrice looked on Philip as her property, and liked to have him tied to her apron-strings. It would certainly be a very unpleasant discovery to her that Philip was tired of his bondage. Lady Kesterton

would have continued to feel sorry for her cousin if Beatrice had behaved with discretion. But it unfortunately happened that morning that Lady Beltane's nerves were less evenly-balanced than usual. She had received the announcement of her husband's approaching arrival at Kesterton Park, and she did not like it. Then Philip had vexed her by his non-appearance the night before, and by his indifferent manner that morning. She showed her pique by an assumption of heedless mirth, and by reckless flirtation with a man who was staying in the house, and in truth she annoyed her hostess so much that when Lady Kesterton carried her off to her boudoir after breakfast it was with the charitable but rather ominous desire to say something "that would do her good."

When Philip came in to luncheon he was a trifle surprised to hear that Lady Beltane was indisposed—was lying down in her own room; but he surmised nothing amiss. Indeed, he was somewhat relieved to find that he was not obliged to meet her. He did not acknowledge that she had the slightest claim on him; and yet he knew that he would have to tell her, sooner or later, that he had fallen in love with Elfrida Paston, and he anticipated rather a stormy scene. But he felt quite confident that although she might be vexed, Lady Beltane would never "overstep the bounds."

He went out again, and after a brisk walk with a friend returned home in the fading light of a November afternoon. Phil left the road and plunged into the Park. Here the light was dimmer, and the mossy ground was damper underfoot, but the air was wonderfully warm and pleasant for the time of the year, and Phil loitered in his walk, enjoying the freshness of the

scents that rose from the moist earth, and the sweetness of the robin's evening song.

It was with a thrill of amazement, almost of disgust, that he recognized the figure of a woman, well-known to him, among the fir-tree stems. What brought Lady Beltane out at that hour? Surely—surely—she was not waiting and watching for him! What did it mean? Had Sir Anthony told her of the morning's conference, and was she furious already? If Phil could have found a pretext for running away at that moment he would have been only too glad to embrace the opportunity. But she had seen him—she was advancing toward him, and retreat was impracticable. He must put the best face upon matters, and get her back to the house as quickly as possible.

"Good-evening," he said, lifting his hat, and speaking with the utmost lightness. "Pleasant time for a walk, don't you think? May I have the pleasure of escorting you back to the house?"

Up to this moment he had not seen her face distinctly, because her back was to the sunset; but now he was close to her, and could look straight into her eyes. She paused before replying, and he knew by that silence and by her face that the interview was not likely to be a pleasant one. She was deathly pale, and there were dark shadows beneath her eyes. Philip's heart sank within him.

"I came out to meet you," she began, in muffled tones, strangely unlike the ringing accents that usually fell from her lips. "I knew you often came this way. I—I wanted to speak to you."

"Yes," said Philip quietly.

The monosyllable sounded very bald and very unsym-

pathetic, but he could not think of anything else to say. If she were going to mention Elfrida, it would be well for him to be upon his guard.

But she was either more wily or more sincere than he knew. She laid one hand upon his arm, and kept it there while she spoke.

"Oh, Phil," she said simply, "I am in such trouble."

"I am very sorry," he answered confusedly—for what else could he say? "I hope it is nothing serious—nothing very wrong."

"Oh, no, it is nothing serious," she answered, with a bitter little laugh; "it is a very commonplace thing that I am going to tell you; and yet I feel as if I should break my heart."

Philip listened—compunctious and afraid. What was she going to say?

"Phil—Beltane comes to-morrow."

"Oh." He had nearly said "Is that all?" but caught himself up in time. "I hope you are not grieving over his arrival," he said with a smile.

"Yes, it is just that. I can't bear to think of it. I am in earnest, Phil. I've got to the end of my tether—I can bear nothing more. I can't live with Beltane any longer—I am miserable—wretched—the most wretched woman in the world. Oh, Phil, help me—no one can help me but you." And then she burst into tears, honest, unaffected tears, and let her head drop on his shoulder.

"Beatrice," he said—he was very much distressed by this self-revelation; he had never thought her capable of feeling so deeply or of speaking out so passionately— "Beatrice—don't say this!"

"Why shouldn't I say it?" she sobbed. "I have not

said so much before because I thought that I could bear it; and I wanted to be a good woman, after all; but I can bear nothing more. I haven't the strength, Phil. I hate that man—I have hated him ever since I married him. There is only one man I ever loved. You know, Phil—you know. And I have come to him to help me—to save me—to take me away from the misery of it all, and help me to forget that I was ever false—false to the man I loved. Oh, Phil, don't be hard upon me now."

"I am not hard, Beatrice," he said, under his breath.
"I want to help you—to save you from yourself."

"You have said a thousand times," she went on, pite-ously, "that you loved me, and that you would sacrifice all the world for me. I don't ask you to sacrifice much, Philip. It is I that have something to sacrifice. Indeed, Phil, I am not a wicked woman. I gave you up once; but I was only a girl. I did not know what it was to love—I did not understand. I love you now."

"But I, Beatrice—I—"

He stopped short; he did not know how to go on. She was quick to fathom his meaning; she raised her head from his shoulder and looked up into his face.

"Phil—don't say that you don't love me now!" she cried.

He could not say it. Perhaps he was weak; but it was a difficult thing to say. His face, however, spoke for him; his attitude, unresponsive and rigid, spoke for him too. There was a moment's silence, and then she flung herself away from him in a passion of rage and scorn.

"Is this the faith that you have sworn to me so often? Is this the love that you used to boast of? Oh, I see

how it is—you have learnt to care for some one else—some one younger than I; some one who will not bring shame and contempt upon you, as I should do. I thought you were faithful, Philip—I trusted you! But men are all alike; I hate them all. I hate you, too "—with sudden fierceness—"hate you as much as I loved you once." And then she broke forth again in passionate sobs. "Oh, Phil, I'll forgive you if you say it is not true."

"I cannot say that, Beatrice. But if there is anything that I can do—"

"Do!" she echoed indignantly. "Why, what is there left for you to do? You have left me—you love me no longer. Is there anything more to be said? You have no heart; you are false and cruel and cold."

"It was not I," he said, hardening a little beneath the battery of accusation, "who deserted you when we might have been man and wife, Beatrice."

"You reproach me with that, do you?" she said. "It was your own fault. If you had been less tame—less spiritless—but it is too late now—too late. If you have left off loving me, the less said the better. But it is very hard on me"—sobbing passionately again—"for I—I always believed in you, Philip, and thought that you would never play me false."

"I think I have been very true to you," he said sadly. "I have wasted the best years of my life in caring for you. If you had been true to me at first, you would never have had to complain. As it is—I cannot change myself. If I could do anything for you I would—anything that would really help you; but it is too late for aught between us but regret. Beatrice, you must forget me. Surely it will not be very hard."

"I shall never forget you—either in love or hate, I shall remember," she said, drying her eyes and turning a little aside. After a moment's pause she spoke again in a harsh, uneven voice. "Who is it?" she asked. "Who is it that has—stolen—you away from me?"

"Nobody has stolen anything," he answered, with some impatience. "Take comfort—she does not care for me."

"It is Elfrida Paston?"

"Yes, it is Elfrida."

"I hate her! I always hated her! But you are right: she does not care for you. She cares for Beaulieu. She has taken him away from Betty, as she has taken you away from me—"

"This is folly, Lady Beltane. She is not responsible for the love she gains."

"Oh, is she not? Do you think she does not try to gain it? I tell you she is an accomplished flirt—a coquette, with tricks enough for a woman twice her years. Oh, yes, you may try to silence me if you will; but it is no use. I am a woman, and I understand other women. You will remember what I say, in spite of yourself; and some day you will see that I speak the truth."

"Beatrice! Listen-"

"I will not be called Beatrice by you," she cried, stamping her foot. Her eyes glowed like live coals; her face was livid and distorted in her rage; her voice was so hoarse as to be almost unrecognizable. As he looked at her he wondered that he had ever loved a woman who was capable of such a storm of rage. "We will be strangers henceforth," she went on, "or if not strangers—enemies. Remember what I say. For if I

can make you feel the weight of my own misery—if I can make her feel it—I shall not hold my hand. She has stolen you from me, and I will make her suffer for her treachery if I can."

She threw out her hand with a gesture, half threatening, half forbidding; then she turned from him, and walked rapidly away. His first impulse was to call her back; then reason restrained him, and he watched her in silence as she sped through the Park toward the broad avenue that led to the house. Her head was lifted, her form was erect: she was careful to show no weakness while she might yet be in his sight. But ere she reached the house her head had sunk, and she was obliged to draw the thick veil which she had fastened to her bonnet over her face, for the hot tears were once more falling from her eyes, and the muscles of her mouth quivered like those of one in deadly pain.

She had made her last throw, and she had failed. The game was over as far as she was concerned. She had lost her stake. But she was still alive to the felicity that is said to lie for some natures in spoiling other people's chances in the great game of life.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PROPHECY OF ILL.

As we have already said, Henry Paston's organization was especially sensitive to the moral and mental atmosphere surrounding him. He seemed able to divine where others only blundered; he had the faculty of reading signs and tokens in faces and actions which were perfectly without meaning to the outer world. And during the few December days before the ball that Sir Anthony had promised to give, it seemed to Henry as if the air were charged with signification of an ominous kind. Philip came to sit with him one evening, in a quiet hour before dinner, and found him uneasy, excited, and less like his usual serene self than his friend had ever seen him.

"What's the matter, Harry? Are you worse this evening, old fellow?"

"No, not a bit. I suppose you mean," said the boy, with a slight, self-conscious laugh, "that I am very cross?"

"Not exactly; but you are not yourself, I think, for some reason or other." And Philip changed his position a little, so that he might see Henry's face more distinctly.

The singular beauty of that boyish face had not changed. The golden hair was as bright as ever; the eyes were almost feverishly brilliant, and the color that tinged the thin cheek was of the intensest crimson. On the white temples a network of blue veins testified to the fragility of the lad's constitution; and, especially of late, an upright line of pain had shown itself between his eyebrows. The wonderful sweetness of his expression was not, however, impaired by this mark that suffering had laid upon him. There was, perhaps, more of a pathetic look than there used to be, and more than ever a refined and noble kind of patience. Hence, it was unusual to see him, as now, with slightly twitching brows and restless eyes, or with the fever-flush so high upon his wasted cheek; and Philip felt instinctively that something—and not merely of a physical nature—must be wrong.

"What is it?" he asked, after watching him for a minute or two.

"Oh, you see it, do you?" said Henry, throwing his head back. "That is the worst of it. I am too poor a creature to hide what I am feeling. I did mean to hold my tongue."

"You generally hide what you feel a great deal too much," said Phil, who spoke as tenderly to him as if he were a woman; "but there is no need to hide it from me. What's wrong?"

Henry had closed his eyes for a moment, with an unwonted contraction of the brows. When he opened his eyes and fixed them upon Philip's face the young man was struck by their expression. It was as if they had been turned in upon themselves and could see things which other mortals could not see.

"Everything is wrong," he said concisely. "There is a shadow over the whole house. Do you not feel it yourself?"

"You are fanciful, Harry." But the shadow, whatever it was, seemed to descend upon Philip's own face as he spoke.

"I wish I were. . . . Oh, Phil, do you think it possible that I may be? . . . But I have had these feelings before about people, and they always turned out right."

"What feelings, dear boy?"

"The feeling of—of—well, of a coming disaster. You mustn't laugh at me, Phil."

"Disaster to whom? I won't laugh at you, though I can but hope you are merely imagining things."

"Disaster to whom?" said Henry dreamily. "Well, I don't know. It sometimes seems to me as though disaster hung over the whole house—over Elfie and you and Sir Anthony, and every one that is dear to me. Over those that are not dear to me, too. There are some in the house—"

He stopped short suddenly, and looked at Philip with eyes which had a new light in them. "Lady Kesterton deos not like me," he said; "she has never said a kind word to me in her life, and yet—if I could—I would sooner warn her of coming evil than any one else. It, seems to me as if the shadow over her were darker than over the others."

"My dear Harry," said Phil, leaning over him and speaking softly, "I should be very sorry if Lady Kesterton heard you talk in this way."

"You think she would call me mad?" said Henry, a smile lighting up his face. "Well—perhaps so; but I'm not mad, for all that, Phil; and I'm afraid you will one day see that I speak the truth."

"What do you mean by the shadow of which you

speak?" asked Philip, wondering whether it would be better to make him explain himself further, or let the matter sink into oblivion.

But Henry was usually so clear-headed that he did not think it could harm him to speak out. And there was less trace of excitement than before in his voice and manner as he replied:

"I don't know that I can make it plain. From what I've heard about Scotch second-sight I could almost fancy that I had a little of that gift. I generally dream about the persons first. I don't dream anything intelligible of them. I only know that some danger threatens them; and then, sometimes, when I next see those persons, there seems to be a sort of cloud about them—a sort of darkness. It is very difficult to explain."

"And are you seeing this about us now?" Philip asked, with a smile. "Rather an uncanny idea, is it not? What do I look like when under a cloud?"

But Henry's eyes were grave as he answered:

"It is not so actual and visible a cloud as you think. No; I can't explain it—I can only say that I feel it when it's there. And I believe that it's a danger-signal of some kind. I wish—I wish it did not hang over Elfie—that is all."

"What, the rest of us are of no importance!" said Phil, trying to rally him out of his depression. "You are morbid, Harry; you dwell too much on your own fancies. And they are very useless fancies, too, dear boy, because, after all, they don't enable you to help your friends. Even if you warned us all, of what good would the warning be? We should not know what to avoid."

"I suppose not. Yet it might be of use in some way. Be on your guard yourself, Phil." "I know of no danger," said Philip, smiling and shaking his head, "except those that I shall incur in the great metropolis when I go up next month."

It was in this way that he tried to change a dangerous subject; for he had not as yet told Henry of his intention to leave Kesterton Park. The lad's face changed and colored

"Up to London? But not to stay?"

"Yes, old fellow, to stay. I can't stand this kind of life any longer. I have idled away a good bit of my time, and I must see whether I can't do anything for myself."

"This is something new, isn't it?"

"Yes—unfortunately, quite new. I never thought about it until lately."

"Elfrida will be sorry."

"Will she?" Phil asked the question with unnecessary emphasis.

"Of course she will. And I too—that goes without saying. But perhaps I understand better than Elfie would do; because I have thought—sometimes—of what I should like to have done if I had been—stronger."

"Oh, so you have both been judging me?" said Philip, a little bitterly. "You think I have failed in life, too—as your sister does."

"Elfie and I have never talked about it. No, I don't think you have failed," said Henry, simply, "because you have always done what you wanted; but I think you might perhaps have wanted to do more."

Philip sighed. "It is odd that I never looked at it before in the light which seems so natural to you two," he said. Then, after a pause: "Henry, do you know what I wish for more than anything in earth or heaven?"

Henry shook his head. "I have no idea. You have not often seemed to care for anything."

"I care for something now. I love your sister, and I want to make her my wife."

A radiantly happy smile flitted over the boy's thin face. He put out his hand to Philip's with one of the gentle, kindly gestures which so often showed the innate sweetness and kindliness of his nature. "I think I must have guessed part of it," he said. "I am very glad." And then, after a short pause, "It is good of you."

"Good of me? I must deny the goodness."

"No, I think not; because some men would not have spoken until after the twelfth—Elfrida's twenty-first birthday, you know, when we both hope that we shall learn a little more about ourselves than we know now."

"That is not a matter that I care about," said Philip, with a momentary stiffness. Then, smiling at his own tone, "I can trust Sir Anthony. He has always said to me that it would be all right."

"Have you told him what you wish?"

"I have."

"And—did he—"

"He seemed amused," said Philip, rather ruefully, "and nothing more. But that is not what troubles me, Harry. It is Elfie herself. She does not care for me."

"Oh, but indeed she does," cried Henry, his face flushing and his eyes gleaming with indignant surprise. "She must care for you—how can she do otherwise? Why, Phil, you have always been our best friend."

"Perhaps that is the worst of it. If I had come to her as a stranger—if she had never seen me before—perhaps

she might have learned to love me But she says that it is impossible."

"May I speak to her?"

"Speak if you like; but don't try to force her, Henry. Don't talk about such foolish things as—as 'gratitude,' for instance. She has no reason to be grateful to me, and the very word"—with a slight, pained smile—"might make her hate me."

"She could not do that. I have read," said Henry meditatively, "of girls not knowing their own minds—making mistakes about their feelings, and so on: perhaps it is a case of this kind. It will be interesting to study it in real life. I think Elfie will tell me."

"I'm afraid it is hopeless. There's another attraction, Harry. Haven't you seen how Beaulieu is struck with her?"

"Beaulieu? But Beaulieu," said Henry, with some hesitation, "belongs to Lady Betty."

"Exactly. But perhaps Beaulieu does not think so. I wish he did. I wish he had never come near the place."

"It would have been very jolly, certainly, if Elfie would have married you. Would you have taken her off to London?"

"If I had, I should not have left you behind, dear boy," said Philip tenderly. "You should have come, too."

"I would rather have you for a brother-in-law than any one in the world," said Henry, quickly; "but at the same time I shall be sorry if ever I have to leave Kesterton. I sometimes think I never shall leave it—while I live."

"Prophecies again! I can listen to no more signs

and omens, save the omen of the dressing-bell," said Philip, with a somewhat feigned carelessness. "Goodby, old fellow. And tell me, if you can," dropping his voice to a more earnest tone, "what your sister says of me."

It was "your sister" now, not "Elfie," as of old. The more familiar diminutive had disappeared before the influence of Philip's love. Henry was hardly experienced enough to appreciate the significance of the change; but he noted it, nevertheless.

When Elfrida came into the room, later in the evening, and sat down beside his couch for the quiet chat which brother and sister loved so well, he looked at her with a new sort of observation—an expression of keen consideration which she was quick to perceive.

"What is it, Henry? What are you looking at me for?" The color rose a little in her delicate, oval face, as she asked the question.

"I wanted to see," he answered, "what there was to admire in that pallid countenance of yours."

He spoke half-jokingly, with a smile curving his lips. The feverish excitement which he had shown during his talk with Philip had subsided; indeed, he made great efforts to conceal it, and other signs of *malaise*, from his sister's eyes. His unselfishness reached an unusual height. Few chronic invalids hide their symptoms as sedulously as he tried to do.

"Is it pallid? It feels rather red just now," said Elfrida, putting up her hands to screen her flushing cheeks. Then she said suddenly, "Oh, Harry, what is it? You look as if you knew something."

"Nothing very bad," said her brother, rather sorrow-

fully. "Only that you have gained something which, I think, you do not value."

She looked at him with frightened eyes. "Hal, dear, don't speak so reproachfully. I don't know, really, what you mean."

"Don't you, dear? Don't you know that Philip-"

"Philip!" There was disdain in her tone. "Philip is very foolish; he ought never to have spoken to you."

"And why not?"

"He should not have bothered you," said Elfrida, laying caressing fingers against his cheek, and speaking in gently coaxing tones, "when he knew that he had no chance."

"No chance? Of winning your love, do you mean, Elfie?"

"Exactly." She nodded in her most convincing way. "Though how at your age you know anything about love, you clever boy, I'm sure I cannot tell."

"Elfie, darling, be serious. Think how good Phil has always been to us. It was through him that we ever came to be educated—cared for—as we have been. Sir Anthony has told me so. We owe him a debt that we have often thought we could never repay. You might have done it, Elfie—if you would."

"But I can't, you see, dear," said Elfie, plaintively. She brought her lips down to the level of Henry's hand and kissed it, as if by way of atonement for her speech.

"Don't you like him?"

"Oh, yes, well enough. Not as a wife should love her husband."

"But you are not a wife," said Henry, with boyish triumph, "so you can't love him in that way yet, you see. The love would come in time."

"Oh, no, it wouldn't, Henry."

"I think it would. And we could then be so happy together! Phil would go off to London and make a home for you there—where you would not have to teach children or do anything disagreeable; and I should perhaps come with you if I was strong enough, and everything would be nice."

"But, Hal, I thought you never wanted to leave Kesterton?"

"I don't. But I have thought lately that perhaps it would be best if I did. We are only in the way here, Elfie. Let us take the first opportunity of getting out into the world."

Elfrida was silent for a moment. Unnumbered feelings and wishes which she felt that Henry would not altogether understand surged up in her heart. It was with a trembling voice that she at last replied:

"I don't think we can settle matters so easily, Henry. Oh, believe me, dear, I do know what I am saying; I do understand. I wish with my whole heart that I could repay our debt to Philip. But not in that way, Hal—not in that way."

"Is there any other?" said Henry. He was unusually wise and sympathetic for his age and sex, but it was hardly to be expected that he should understand a woman's heart. And Elfrida was painfully, helplessly conscious of his want of comprehension.

"I can't help it," she said. "You don't know—it is not the same for you—you are not a girl. Henry, it seems to me that I have changed, too, during the last few weeks. I am not a child any more; I am a woman. And I have a woman's needs and instincts—oh, I know you will not understand me, but it is true. I have

found my soul, Hal—or, rather, it was found for me and waked up to life by some one—not Philip Winyates—another—"

"Another!" re-echoed Henry, in surprise. "Is it possible that there is some one else who loves you, Elfie? And I did not know!"

She bent her head lower and lower, and the color overspread her face and neck. "I can't help it, Henry," she murmured. "He says he loves me—he told me so some days ago. And I have been wanting to tell you, but I did not dare."

"Who is it, then?" said Henry. His face had turned pale and looked almost stern, so rigidly were the features set. "Elfie, tell me his name."

She answered him humbly, without lifting her head. "Don't be angry, Hal," she murmured. "It is Lord Beaulieu—Lionel."

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CHAPTER XXIV.

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LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

"ELFIE! Elfie! what have you done?"

These were the words with which Henry received his sister's confidence, and having uttered them he turned his face to the cushion and would say no more.

"What have I done?" Elfrida asked, in some amazement. "Hal, dear, I don't know what you mean. Surely there is nothing wrong in my loving Lionel. He loves me, too—and he wants me—he wants me to be his wife!"

"Don't tell me any more," said Henry, in stifled tones. "I can't bear it. I don't think you know what you are doing. You must let me think."

Elfrida drew herself away from her kneeling position, and held up her head. For the first time in her life she was conscious of a feeling of offence and anger with her brother. For the first time a shadow fell between them—one of those shadows of wounded feeling which are easier to avoid than to remove.

"Think as much as you please," she said quickly, but do not imagine that you can ever alter what has been settled between Lionel and me."

She moved backward a step while speaking, but Henry uncovered his face, and turned it towards her with so much reproach in his pathetic eyes, that his sister hastily threw herself once more on her knees beside him and lavished kisses on his thin, worn face. "Darling, forgive me for speaking so crossly," she said. "I know you are surprised, and you want to think things over; but after all, Hal, dear, don't you think I know best?"

"You are a girl, dear, and you are 'in love,' as people say; and don't lookers-on sometimes see most of the game?"

"If there is a game to see," she answered, with an attempt at her wonted lightness of tone. "But in this case it is all plain sailing. Lord Beaulieu is his own master. He has no one to consult. And I am a woman, Hal—years older than you, remember—and I love him."

"But there are other considerations, Elfie. Does he know more than we do about our position in the world? Is he content to accept you as you are?"

"Perfectly," said Elfrida, with a proud look. "He does not mind one bit whether I am penniless or not. He knows that our mother was not a lady by birth. I told him all that. And he accepts me as I am. I love him the more for it."

"But if—" Henry began, and then he paused. To Elfrida, at least, he resolved to say nothing more. He would wait for her twenty-first birthday, when, he had been led to suppose, a good deal that was now hidden would be made clear. He had thought more than Elfrida had of the possibility that there was a stain upon their birth. This, he knew, would weigh with a man like Lord Beaulieu far more than any consideration of poverty or mean ancestry. But he would not suggest anything of this sort to Elfrida's mind. He

would wait and see what the 13th of December would bring forth.

So he let Elfrida kiss him again, very tenderly this time, and then bade her call Terry, for he was tired and wanted to go to bed. And Elfie cast down her eyes as he spoke for fear that he should see that they were lighted up with a gleam of satisfaction of which she was heartily ashamed and yet did not know how to suppress. For Henry's departure to his own room meant that the girl was now free to make certain little changes in her own dress for which she had been longing, but for which she had been unwilling to leave her brother's side as long as he seemed to want her company.

It was not a night on which she was expected to appear in the drawing-room. Lady Kesterton had told her so, in her very coldest tones, and Elfrida well knew the reason. Lord Beaulieu had been invited, and the too attractive little governess was to be kept out of the way. At the same time there were reasons why Elfrida wanted to make herself look beautiful. A little note from Beaulieu lay in her pocket—she had been very conscious of it, even while she was talking to Henry—and in this note he begged her to come into the picture-gallery when dinner was over. He hoped to be able to get five minutes with her then.

"Is it wrong, is it underhand, I wonder?" Efrida asked herself, as she flung off the old school-room frock and clad herself in the soft white muslin that Beaulieu liked to see her wear. Her eyes were exceptionally brilliant, her cheeks glowed with unaccustomed color, her hands trembled with excitement. The little pang of conscience which had assailed her was quickly passed. It did not seem to her as yet natural that she

should mistrust her lover. He was so frank, so bright, so devoutly in love with her. She did what he told her without a thrill of fear.

It was a quarter to ten when at last she stole out into the long dark gallery, lighted only by the windows on one side. It had recently been fitted up with electric lamps, but at present these were not lighted. Elfrida went softly to one of the windows and stood within the shadow of the curtain gazing out upon the night. Beaulieu would know where to find her when he came.

And yet it was a surprise to her when his arm slid round her waist, and she suddenly felt the pressure of his lips upon her cheeks.

"Mayn't I?" he whispered penitently, as she started and tried to draw herself away. "I did not mean to frighten you, dear; you let me kiss you last time."

"But you asked my leave first," said Elfrida: and in the dim light he could just see that she was smiling.

"I will ask it now," he said. "Will you give me leave?-just one! Oh, Elfie, I thought I should never get away from that dinner-table. Have you been here long?"

"Not long; but I'm not sure whether I ought to come at all."

"Why not, darling?"

"It seems like cheating. I am sure Lady Kesterton would be very angry if she knew; and—your people—"

"But I have no 'people,' "he said, with a light laugh; "and they could not object to you if I had. And you are not bound to tell Lady Kesterton your secrets, are vou?"

"No, but I live in her house, and I am sure she would

say that I was deceiving her."

"Never mind what she would say, dearest; I am only waiting for the earliest opportunity to speak to Sir Anthony—he is your guardian, isn't he?—and then I shall bear you off in triumph. Shall I speak to him tonight?"

Elfrida hesitated. "He ought to know—" she began. "Of course—"

Lord Beaulieu interrupted her with his ready, boyish laugh. "I know what you mean, you dear little humbug. You don't want me to speak until after the ball. It would spoil your pleasure if I did, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, Lord Beaulieu—well, Lionel, then—what a tease you are. I really think you ought to speak at once, or else—"

"Or else what, madam?"

"Or else I ought not to meet you here." And Elfrida's voice quivered a little with a consciousness of pain—possibly of wrong-doing. And in answer to that quiver Beaulieu's tones also softened.

"My darling, I don't think you are doing wrong at all. We are not keeping our secret because we are afraid that the truth should be known. We are keeping it only for convenience sake—for a day or two. There is no harm in it. I will speak to Sir Anthony on the day after the ball. And don't be afraid—nobody shall blame you."

"But I really have a reason, Lionel," said Elfrida earnestly. "Don't you remember I told you that from various things that have been said I believe I am to hear all about myself on my twenty-first birthday—which happens to be the day of the ball? And you had better know all about me first—before you speak to Sir

Anthony. There has been such a mystery, you know, about Sir Anthony's reasons for keeping us here that one cannot help fancying there might be something unpleasant—something terrible—so I want you to wait till then."

"Don't you trust my love, Elfrida?"

"Yes, yes, I do. But I want you to wait."

"You make me half inclined to say that I will not. I have a good mind to go to Sir Anthony at once and tell him the truth."

"No, no, you must not defy Fate in that way. Besides, you forget—I want to be at the ball in all my bravery," said Elfrida, cleverly feigning an innocent vanity which she did not really feel, "and if there is any fuss beforehand, Lady Kesterton will perhaps not let me come—"

"Poor little darling! To think that you are under the thumb of that old vixen. Well, it will soon be over, and then you will be under my thumb. Shall you like that any better?"

"You forget—you will be under mine," said Elfie, saucily; and then she raised her soft lips to meet his kiss, as if to ask pardon for the mock defiance of his authority.

"I must go," he said, lingering nevertheless, as if he grudged the moments spent away from her. "I came out of the dining-room on some pretext of joining the ladies at once. I must be off or I shall be missed. Are you not coming down too?"

"Not to-night. I was told I should not be wanted."

"We shall be as dull as ditch-water without you. When you are my wife, you will be the brighest star in any assembly—as you are now. It is just because Lady

Kesterton sees that fact that she tries to keep you away, my dearest one. Well, by and by—"

"Oh, go, Lionel, go; I hear footsteps coming. We must not be found here together," said Elfrida, hurriedly. But she was a little too late. The gallery door was opened, and a figure advanced, rather slowly and timidly, into the room.

"Is any one here?" said a voice that both Elfie and Lionel knew very well, and which made them start guiltily apart. It was the voice of Lady Betty.

Before either of them could answer she had pressed her finger on the electric button connected with the great central group of incandescent lamps, which all at once sprang into a warm brilliancy, the whiteness of their light being softened by rose-colored glass. There was no escape from that sudden flood of light. Lady Betty stood near the door, looking with astonished eyes from Elfrida to Beaulieu, who stood at about a couple of yards' distance from each other, and who bore a somewhat shame-faced and disconcerted appearance. The silence that they kept perhaps revealed more than speech would have done. Lady Betty's soft little face suddenly turned crimson. She drew up her little fair head with a dignity of which nobody would ever have thought her capable.

"I am sorry. I am afraid I have interrupted a conversation," she said quietly and clearly. "I beg your pardon. I will go."

"Lady Betty, stay one moment—please stay!" cried Elfrida, darting forward. But Betty was gone, and Lionel laid a firm, detaining grip on the girl's arm.

[&]quot;Do not go," he said, frowning as she had never seen

him frown before. "What business had she to come here? Can one never have a moment's peace?"

Elfrida did not understand either the look or the tone. "Oh, let me run after her and explain," she said pleadingly. "She will think me so deceitful and wrong—I know she will. Do let me go to her and tell her everything."

"Tell Betty Stormont everything? What are you thinking of?" said Beaulieu, still in his vexed, imperious tone. "No, Elfrida, if any one is to tell her, I will be the one."

"I do not like her to think ill of me," said Elfrida, standing still with the tear-drops in her eyes.

"She will not think ill of you, dear. If of any one, it will be of me," he said, with a momentary curl of his lip. "There—you don't understand. I suppose I must go. Trust to me, little woman. It will be all right. I will manage everything."

She let him kiss her once again upon the lips before he left the gallery, but she felt chilled. What was there that she did not understand? Why should Betty Stormont, of all people, think ill of him? And then, quite suddenly, there flashed into her mind a remembrance of some merry words spoken by Henry in a jesting mood, on her return to Kesterton Park, "Lady Betty's young man." That was what he had called Lord Beaulieu, and Elfrida had never stopped to ask whether there was any serious meaning in his words. Certainly, she reflected, Beaulieu and Lady Betty were not engaged. She would have heard of the engagement if there had been one. And Betty was a mere child still—a baby at heart, although she was "out" in the world. It could not be possible that there was any-

thing between her and Lionel of which Elfrida did not know?

She stood still for a few moments, in the full light of the electric lamps, which seemed to be illuminating her intellect as they had already illuminated the room. She remembered that it was very soon after her arrival in the house that Lord Beaulieu began to make love to her. And she-yes, she acknowledged it now-she had very speedily lost her head, as well as her heart. She had been carried away by a full tide of hope and joy and love. She had never thought of drawing back, of making cautious inquiries, of maintaining a prudent reserve. She had forgotten all about the difference of position between herself and him. He was simply a bright-faced young fellow, with a winning manner and a ready tongue; and he had completely won her heart. To her he was already "Lionel," not Lord Beaulieu; and it was only by a great effort that she could remember the possible existence of other claims which might take him away from her.

Now for the first time she saw the situation with unenviable clearness. She saw that Henry's words might possibly have had a serious meaning. She saw that the world might accuse her of baseness and meanness, if by any chance it was true that she had stolen Lionel's heart from Lady Betty, who had always been so kind to her.

Then she remembered Philip Winyates, and his previous attachment to Lady Beltane, and her heart grew hot within her. It seemed to her no compliment that she should have won men's hearts away from the women whom they had loved in days gone by. "Are men all like this?" she said to herself. "Am I never to be any

one's first love?" And she bit her lip, and dashed away a somewhat petulant tear from her eyes. She was still a child at heart, and a child who had not yet been taught the lessons of self-restraint and self-suppression which life demands that all of us should learn.

Meanwhile Mrs. Terry had found her pet and patient unusually restless and feverish, and had left her door open, so that she, in the next room, could hear the sound of every movement. She was dozing over her needlework at last, however, and in imminent danger of setting her cap on fire, when a step on the floor and a hand laid softly on her shoulder made her spring up in affright.

"Miss Elfie? Bless me—no, it's Lady Betty; I beg pardon, my lady, did you want anything?"

"Only to know if Miss Elfrida was here, Terry," said Lady Betty. "I wanted to speak to her—but it will do in the morning if she has gone to bed."

"I think she has, my lady; but I'll call her in a moment, if you like."

"No, certainly not; it is nearly twelve o'clock."

"So it is; and you look very tired, my lady."

Lady Betty reddened a little: she knew that her face bore the traces of certain unruly tears, but she had not thought that they would be visible to old Terry. "I am rather tired," she said in a low voice, "and I think I will go to bed at once. How is Mr. Henry to-night?"

"Sadly, my lady. Very feverish, and in a good bit

of pain."

"I'm sorry to hear it. Say good-night to him for me."

She glided to the door, but as she laid her hand upon the handle, a faint voice sounded from the other room. "Terry, is that not Lady Betty?"

Terry glanced at the visitor, and receiving a nod of permission to reply, said, "Yes, Mr. Henry; she wants to know how you are."

"If she would come and put her hand on my forehead for a minute or two," said the boy, "I think I should go to sleep."

Terry looked somewhat doubtfully at Lady Betty; but the girl did not hesitate. "I'm here; I'll come," she said gently. And then she entered the dark room and felt her way to Henry's side.

The cold hand laid on his hot brow had a soothing effect. "That's very nice," he murmured. "I knew it would rest me if you came. You are very kind—too kind."

"Oh, no," said Lady Betty.

"Yes, indeed. Thank you, so much. I wish—I wish I could do anything for you in return," said the boy, softly. "But I can't—I can't."

She did not answer, although she bent above him for a minute or two longer—tenderly, as a sister might have done. Perhaps she was not able to speak, for a tear-drop fell from her eyes upon his hand, which was lying outside the bedclothes. Presently she said, "Good-night," and stole out of the room. When she had gone, the boy raised the hand to his lips and gently kissed the tear away. But Lady Betty's visit did not make him sleep better, after all.

CHAPTER XXV.

RENUNCIATION.

"Elfie, will you speak to me for a moment?"

"I am afraid I can't wait, Lady Betty; it is time for the children's lessons."

"No. They are going to have a holiday. I asked Lady Kesterton to give them one, and also to let me come and tell you so."

"Why?" said Elfrida, coloring vividly, in spite of her resolution not to betray herself.

"Because," answered Lady Betty, with rather a tremulous motion of the lips, although her voice was steady, "because I wanted you to come to my room and have a long talk with me."

The two had met in the long gallery, and Elfrida, who had been, in truth, going to the school-room, was trying to pass by Lady Betty, with only a formal greeting. But Betty had been on her way to seek Elfrida, and would not be prevented from saying what she came to say.

They stood and looked at one another, Elfrida with a curious air of shame and distress, Lady Betty with a serenity which had in it something of the angelic quality. Then Elfrida's hidden feeling burst forth, with starting tears:

"Please, Lady Betty, let me go. I—have nothing to say."

"But I have," said the other, quietly. "It is no use,

Elfie, I must speak; and you needn't say anything at all."

She laid her hand within Elfrida's arm, and led her away to her own sanctum—the pretty little blue-and-white room which was always appropriated to Betty's use when she visited Kesterton Park. There Elfrida was placed in a big chintz chair, rather against her will, and then her hostess closed the door, came up to her, and kissed her forehead. Whereat Elfie, being a little sore and frightened at what had happened, burst into tears.

"You needn't cry, you silly child," said Lady Betty.
"Don't you know you are very lucky?"

There was not the slightest tremulousness in her voice now.

"I feel as if I had been—deceitful," said Elfrida.

"And—what is worse—I can't say anything—I can't tell you anything more."

"Did Lionel tell you not to speak?" asked the girl, with a smile. "That was foolish of him—and I shall tell him so some day. Never mind; there is no necessity for you to say anything. Just listen to me for a few minutes, and then I think you will understand matters better."

Could it be light-hearted, sunshiny little Lady Betty who was speaking? Her words sounded as if they were measured: her voice had the calmness and authority of a woman twice her age. Perhaps the proud spirit of the race to which she belonged had come to her aid; perhaps she felt that she must not betray the traditions of her womanhood. At any rate, she spoke as Elfrida had never heard her speak—no longer like a child, but as a woman of noble birth and noble mind.

"I saw what you were feeling last night," said Lady Betty, "and I think I know what Lionel feels, too. I have known him all my life, you know, Elfie, and I think I may claim to understand him as well as—most people. There was an old arrangement between my family and his—well, scarcely an arrangement, but a feeling, a desire—that I should marry Lionel. These arrangements never come to any good, as surely you must know well enough. It is very foolish—I have often said so—to try to coerce two people into marriage. And, Elfie, there was never anything between Lionel and me but the old idea: there was never anything serious. Lionel never asked me to marry him; and if he did so, you may rest quite certain that I should say 'No.'"

"But you would not always have said so?"

Lady Betty smiled bravely. "I have not thought much about it until quite lately," she said, "and now I have considered it, you see what I think."

"Betty, are you quite—quite sure?"

For an instant a rather haughty look came into Lady Betty's soft, serious little face. She drew herself up with an offended air.

"I am not in the habit of saying what I do not mean," she answered.

"Forgive me," Elfrida murmured, hanging her head. She felt vaguely guilty, and yet she scarcely knew for what.

"Forgive you, dear? There is nothing to forgive," said Betty cheerfully. "Did I speak crossly? I did not mean to; only you seemed to doubt my word for a moment. I suppose you can't imagine that any one in the world can exist without being fond of him, eh?"

She was smiling now, and Elfrida was encouraged to answer also with a smile.

"I think every one likes him."

"Well, one can like people without wishing to marry them, fortunately," said Lady Betty, philosophically. "And now, dear, do you understand? Are you happier?"

And the two girls put their arms round each other's necks and kissed each other—as girls will; but there was a great difference in their faces as they did it, for while Elfrida was rosy and smiling, Lady Betty looked rather grave and pale.

They changed the subject of their conversation immediately afterwards, for indeed it was almost impossible to continue it. Elfrida was withheld from speaking by Lionel's request, and the subject was more painful to Lady Betty than she liked to show. So they fell to talking of dresses and balls, and employed the hours in this way until luncheon, when they were obliged to separate.

Elfrida was busy with the children throughout the afternoon, and, knowing this, Betty decided, after a little hesitation, that she would go to the west wing and inquire after Henry. Terry admitted her to the sittingroom, where she found the lad lying on his couch. He looked sadly white and worn, she thought, and his smile was less radiant and more pathetic than usual. Betty had not meant to stay, but she lingered by his side as if after all she found it difficult to tear herself away. Terry went out of the room, shutting the door behind her, and the two young people were left alone. A veil seemed suddenly withdrawn.

"Thank you for coming to see me last night," said Henry softly. "Why were you so feverish?" said Betty.

"And why were you so sad?"

There was a little silence, and then Betty answered with eyes cast down. "I was not sad. At least—I was only a little grieved—because I thought two of my friends had lost confidence in me."

"Do you mean me? I did not know anything till last night."

"But you know—you know—now?"

"Yes, I know."

Betty sat down on a low chair at his side. It was a relief to her to find that he understood.

"I was not blaming you," she said, "nor any one" (with something of an effort this was said); "but I was sorry to find that Elfie looked on me as an enemy."

"Has she not behaved like one?" said the boy, rather sternly.

"Behaved like one? Oh, no."

"I am afraid—she has taken—something away from you—"

Betty laughed aloud. "What a child you are!" she said, with quite a matronly air. "You talk as if it were a toy which we could give up at will. Love is free, don't you know? I had no claim on Lionel's love."

"But there was an understanding-"

"Of the slightest kind," said Betty valiantly. "And it was between our parents—not between ourselves."

"Lady Betty, can you honestly tell me that you don't care?"

"That's a very odd question from you to me, isn't it?"

"Never mind-tell me."

"Why should you want to know?"

"You are fencing instead of giving a direct answer,"

said Henry, with some impatience. "Tell me or I shall never be at rest."

She looked at him for a moment, and in that moment she learned more of his inmost feelings than a hundred conversations with him might have taught her. His face was slightly flushed, his eyes were humid and appealing. It was easy to read there the gentle, faroff, yet ardent adoration that the poor lad had formed for the girl who had been to him like a sister in Elfrida's absence, and always a source of comfort and a vision of delight; and in that adoration she read also a jealous fear lest she should have been slighted or injured by another. Even if it were his sister who had injured her, it was plain to see that Henry would not easily forgive.

Lady Betty raised her graceful little head, and her face turned rather pale. She had never told a lie in her life, and she was about to tell one now. She considered it a necessity, but it was a terrible necessity to her.

"I don't care," she said.

"You don't care for Lord Beaulieu?"

"Only as an old friend. But you ought not to put these questions to me."

"I don't mind what I ought not to do," said Henry, with a little movement of his thin hand towards hers. She had often taken it before, but she did not do so now. Her own was trembling, and had turned cold as ice. She was afraid that he would suspect something wrong if he held it in his own. "I don't mind so long as I feel that Elfie is not to blame."

"She is not to blame at all, and you are not to be vexed with her," said Lady Betty with decision. "I am very much pleased about it—delighted. I have not

heard anything for a long time that has pleased me so much. I dare say there may be a little fuss made about it, by relations—and friends—and people; but whatever happens you must remember that Elfrida is in no way to blame, and that I—I—never cared for Lionel."

She could not help a little tremor in making this last statement, but Henry was not keen enough to perceive it. He lay back and smiled, with a wonderful clearing of eye and brow. "Then I may be happy?" he said.

"You may be perfectly happy and satisfied. And will it not be pleasant when Elfie is settled at Bewley, and we can go over and see her?"

Poor little girl! It was the life she had always dreamed of for herself. To be settled at Bewley had been the goal of her life, pointed out to her ever since she was ten years old. But she had renounced her desires; and she was determined to make her renunciation quite complete.

"Ah!" said Henry, "if I could only go! I should like to see Elfie in a home of her own. But I don't want to begin thinking of what I should like—it is a dangerous practice when there are so many things."

"I must run away, so as not to tempt you into the dangerous practice by beginning to wish myself," said Lady Betty, rising. "Good-by. Be nice to Elfie when you see her, and to Lionel too. Promise!"

"I promise," said Henry, smiling. And then she went away; but instead of traversing the picture-gallery, and so regaining the main part of the house, she turned down the little side-stair, and stood with her face pressed to the cold panes of glass in the gardendoor.

It was a cold and wintry world that she saw without;

and the light was beginning to fail, for it was after four o'clock on a December afternoon; but, although Betty shivered, she felt as if the cold and the dimness suited her just then. She had been very brave and very successful, she had not allowed anybody to see the wound that Beaulieu's desertion had inflicted upon her; she had held up her head and smiled, although she felt as if her very life were being torn away. She was not yet eighteen, and there was perhaps less vigor in her love than if she had come to riper years; but there was a sting which was almost as painful as that of love could be. A marriage between herself and Lionel had been, far more than she would allow to Henry, a foregone conclusion for many years, and Lionel's defection would be widely known and severely commented upon. Indeed, he had been hurried by his passion into going further than he had intended to go, and was suffering from his conscience in consequence, but Betty did not know this, and imagined him as enjoying all the triumph and ecstacy of successful love. Nevertheless she did not feel bitter against him. She supposed that he could not help it. "Love was free," as she had said to Elfrida: she had not been actually engaged to Lionel, and she had no right to claim his allegiance.

The tears filled her eyes and ran down her cheeks as she stood with her face to the glass door. Her strength seemed to have deserted her, and she wanted to regain a little calmness and composure before she went back to the drawing-room for tea. It did not take long for her stout heart to win the victory.

"What a little silly I am!" she said to herself by and by. "Crying never mended anything, as my old nurse used to say. I ought rather to be thinking what else I can do to smooth Beaulieu's way. For there will be an awful, fuss when the truth comes to light. I wish I could see him for a moment."

It seemed as though the wish brought about its own fulfilment, for scarcely were the words out of her mouth when a tall, broad-shouldered young fellow in gaiters, with a gun over his shoulder, came tramping down the gravelled path which led straight to the garden-door. Betty's heart gave a great leap. It was Lionel, and he was coming this way so that he might visit the west wing before he made his appearance in the drawing-room? So, this was his habit, was it?—and for the moment Betty's heart felt very sore. There seemed to be so many things going on of which she had been kept in ignorance.

But this feeling was immediately surmounted and crushed down. She herself opened the door to Lionel, and met him with her brightest smile.

"Betty!" he said, recoiling with a startled look. "Betty, I saw some one at the door, but I did not know it was you."

"No, I suppose not," said Betty, with a little nod.

"But I am glad you came in this way, all the same. I wanted to speak to you. Put your gun down in that corner, my lord, and listen to me."

"I will do as your ladyship pleases, of course," said Beaulieu, with a bow and a laugh, though his face wore a somewhat uneasy look. "But is not this an odd place for an interview?"

"It is probably the one place in the house where we shall not be interrupted," Betty replied, "and I have something very particular to say."

He folded his arms and stood upright to listen, with

an air of having to undergo something disagreeable. If Betty had been on the lookout for affronts she might have felt hurt or offended by this attitude; but she was too high-minded to dwell on trifles, and she spoke in her usually sweet and gentle manner.

"I think I have cause to be angry with you, Lionel, for not making me your confidante," she began. "Why didn't you tell me? Don't you know that there is nothing which would have pleased me more?"

No, he did not know. As a matter of fact he had imagined that Betty would be very much aggrieved by his preference of Elfrida. But of course he could not say so to her. He could only stammer out something unintelligible and look extremely awkward.

"I am very fond of Elfrida," Betty went on. "I think she is very beautiful and good and clever—just the wife for you, Beaulieu, and just the woman to be misstress of Bewley Hall."

"She has told you, then?" There was incipient vexation in his tone.

"No, she has said nothing. But you know I saw for myself."

"I assure you, Betty—" Lionel began; but of what he meant to assure her Betty never heard, for she thought it best to go on serenely with her own little speech.

"It is a great pleasure to me," she said, "and I think it will be a relief to both of us to feel that our families cannot expect any more from either of us—you know what I mean. I can't help referring to that stupid old arrangement, because it has been dinned into our ears ever since we were little children, has it not? You know we have laughed about it together, Lionel." There was a little wistfulness in her tone.

"Yes, we did," said Lionel. "Of course, Betty, people can't arrange beforehand about marriage and things like that."

"Of course they can't," said Lady Betty.

"And everybody knew that—really. I never thought of it as anything but a joke—did you?"

This was carrying the war into the enemy's country indeed. Lionel felt exceedingly hot and uncomfortable.

"Well, you see," he said, "if Elfrida hadn't come in my way, and if you had liked me, Betty—"

"Oh, you blundering boy!" cried Betty, with a little shriek of laughter, "don't you know that that is the very thing you ought not to have said? I never heard anything so stupid. Seriously, Lionel, I am angry with you: because you have been so distrustful of me. To have made Elfrida love you, and then to tell her that she must hide it from me—"

"I see. I'm awfully sorry, Betty," said the young man. "I never meant to distrust you."

"It looks as if you did," said Betty, with spirit. "And," flushing scarlet, "it might make people say the very things we don't want them to say. We have been old friends for a great many years; you would not like people to gossip about us, and say that you had jilted me, thrown me over, or anything, would you?"

"By Jove, Betty, if they say such things, I'll knock their heads off."

"You needn't do that, but you might as well avoid any opportunity of giving rise to such remarks. Now, if I had been kept entirely in the dark, and had been taken by surprise when your engagement was announced, why, what on earth do you think Beatrice would *not* have said?" "I've been an ass to keep my secrets from you, Betty," said Lionel, in high good-humor. "And you are—a trump!"

"Well," said Betty, nodding, "you will see the advantage of having told me first. I shall announce the fact

myself to Lady Beltane-"

"Not yet!" said the young man. "Not until I have spoken to Sir Anthony."

"And when will you do that?"

"After the ball—she wants that function to be got over first."

"Ah! Well, perhaps she is right. But I wish you could go and do it now, Lionel. It always seems to me such a pity to make secrets out of things. Can I do anything for you in smoothing the way?"

"Nothing, thanks, dear. Betty, you are awfully good. I hope I shall have a chance of standing your friend too, some day."

"You must always stand my friend," she said, with her brightest smile. "And now go round to the front door and pay your proper call. You will not see Elfrida this afternoon, so it is no use coming in this way. Good-by; I shall see you by and by."

She watched him from the window as he strode along the gravelled path in the dim winter twilight, and then she sat down on the lowest step of the stairs and cried for five minutes as if her heart would break. But there were no traces of tears on her bright, soft face when she met Lord Beaulieu in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LADY KESTERTON'S BALL.

The doors of Kesterton Park had opened wide to receive some scores of guests. "The country" had mustered in full force; the metropolis itself had sent down a goodly number of guests. Kesterton Park was so seldom thrown open; its host and hostess were considered so "exclusive" that when invitations were issued to an entertainment there was a general rush to obtain them.

Dancing went on in the picture-gallery. The floor was excellent, and a small dais had been erected for the musicians at one end of it. The rose-shaded electric lighting was a great success, and the tints of the lampshades were repeated in the banks of azaleas and roses which were the wonder of all the guests. It was rumored that Sir Anthony had sent for these flowers to Cannes and Nice; certainly he had spared no expense, and no ball of similar splendor had been given at the Park within the memory of man.

It was professedly a fancy ball; but fancy-dress was not de rigueur for all the guests. The younger people had been glad enough to rig themselves out in strange garments; but the chaperons and elder men generally preferred a more ordinary costume. There was a pretty sprinkling of uniforms. Lord Beaulieu came as Sir Walter Raleigh, and Philip (following out Elfrida's

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suggestion) as Charles I., but the brighter and more beautiful dresses, of course, belonged to the ladies of the party, and among them were some very dainty devices. Lady Beltane, with a subtle malice which very few divined, came as a lady of Charles I.'s Court; this caused her to be paired off, in people's minds, with Philip—which was exactly the result that she desired. She had scarcely spoken to him since the day of their stormy interview in the park, and Philip had been glad to think that she avoided him; but on this occasion, to his embarrassment and disgust, she affected the friend-liest manner in the world.

"Do you hear what they are saying?" she murmured to him behind her white feather fan, as they stood together at one end of the gallery before the dancing had begun. "Do you notice what everybody says?"

"I fear I am ignorant," said Philip politely. He would have been very glad to escape from her side, but she had laid her finger-tips upon his arm without invitation, and asked to be escorted up the gallery. She now stood still in a recess, and looked at him with as bright a smile as if she had never wept upon his shoulder or hurled reproaches upon him for his unfaithfulness to her.

"They are saying what a good pair we make! Our dresses match beautifully, do they not? I am afraid it is no use your trying to get away from me, Mr. Winyates; we are such an admirable couple that it would be a general loss if we did not promenade together now and then."

"I shall be only too honored," said Philip, with a bow.
"You may well say so," returned Lady Beltane. "I have the best gown in the room. I make no apology

for telling you that, for you would have heard it before long from my enemies if not from my friends. They would have said that I was wasting my husband's money on my gowns. Fortunately he can afford it."

There was a veiled insolence in her tone. Philip knew that she was trying to fling his poverty in his teeth.

"Look at my pearls," said Lady Beltane negligently. "I have not only a necklace of them but a long girdle, you see. And the front of my dress is pearl-embroidered too. The one thing I objected to in this costume was the necessity, the costumer told me, that I was under of having a wig with little bunches of curls on either side—à la Henrietta Maria. I absolutely declined the wig, although I was told that to wear my hair in the ordinary state would quite spoil the costume. Do you think it does?"

He was obliged to look at her. He had been trying to keep his eyes away from that dazzling vision of beauty and magnificence. He knew that she was longing for his admiration; and he was half-afraid—nay, more than half-afraid—that if he looked he should be compelled to give it. And he was in the mood when he wanted to reserve all his admiration for Elfrida.

But now he was obliged to look. Her dress was exceedingly low, and her beautiful arms were bare. The train was of beautiful pale satin, and the underdress of white brocade, embroidered as she had said, with pearls. The necklace and girdle were also of pearls; and if they were real, must have cost fabulous sums. The costume was infinitely becoming to her, if not quite historically correct, and as Philip looked he was compelled to admire. Lady Beltane smiled triumphantly; she had waited for that moment of unwill-

ing admiration before she made a stroke that she had been resolved to make. The game was over indeed, as she had told herself; but she might still amuse herself by a few haphazard attempts to renew it.

"You have looked at me at last," she murmured, in an entirely different tone of voice, "and you have given me the courage that I lacked. I have been wanting to speak to you for days. Philip, will you not forgive me?"

"Lady Beltane, this is not a moment in which to speak of such things—"

"Don't be so hard, Philip. Don't be so conventional. Any moment is the right one—at least for me. I want to tell you how bitterly I have repented of what I said the other night."

Her eyes softened; she bit her beautiful lip as if she were embarrassed. Then she raised her fan so as to cover her mouth.

"I was out of my mind, I think," she said softly.

"I did not mean half I said. And I want—I do want,
Philip—still to be your friend."

"No one can be my friend," he said, after a troubled pause, "who is not the friend of the woman I love."

"But I will be her friend," she murmured. "I will indeed. I have been jealous of her power hitherto. She is so beautiful, Philip, that women cannot help being jealous of her. But I will put that all aside. Only forgive me, and be friends with me, and I will love her—for your sake. Don't be so harsh with me, Phil."

What man could resist this gentle flattery? Philip listened and relented.

"I did not mean to speak harshly," he said, thinking that he had been very cruel towards this beautiful woman, who, after all, had loved him long and well; "and I am quite willing to be your friend if you will accept my friendship. I think you refused it before."

"You are ungenerous!" she whispered. "I refused it in my anger—in my—my despair. I wanted something better than your friendship then. But I see now that it was a dream: I have thought better of all that. I want nothing but to be your friend and hers."

"I shall be only too glad," said Philip. "I never wanted to be at enmity with you, Beatrice."

The name slipped out unawares, and his voice had assumed its kindlier tones. Lady Beltane's eyes shone with triumph: she knew that she had scored a success.

"You will dance with me, will you not?" she said.
"I am going to dance a little—just a very little—and we can sit out for the rest of the time. And supper too—you will take me in to supper?"

Philip winced. "I thought I heard that you were to fall to Sir Anthony's lot?" he said.

"Were you engaged to Elfrida?" she said, smiling at him. "But you can have her too, you know. Oh, I won't take any refusal: we are going home in a day or two, and you will perhaps never see me any more. But where is Elfrida, by the way? I have seen nothing of her as yet, and there have been the most remarkable rumors current about her dress."

"I suppose she is coming later," said Philip quietly, although he had been asking himself the same question. "There is Lady Betty—like a snowflake—with Lord Beaulieu, I see."

"They make a nice pair, don't they?" said Lady Beltane, indifferently. "Of course you know that that has been settled for ages. I should think the marriage would take place soon, but Betty will arrange all that for herself. She is a wilful young woman."

"Why does not the dancing begin?" said Philip, abruptly. He did not want to discuss Lord Beaulieu's intentions then—he thought them already sufficiently plain.

"I thought you knew all about it," exclaimed his fair partner. "Don't you remember Sir Anthony's whim? He wants the ball to open with a grand quadrille of the fancy dresses. See, it is forming now—it has been arranged beforehand, I believe. You are not in it? Neither am I. I suppose they thought us too old to dance."

"Why are they waiting, then?"

"Oh, Sir Anthony is to join in it—to open proceedings. I don't see him yet."

"Perhaps I ought to go and look for him. I have really taken so little interest in this affair that I don't know half the arrangements. As I am going away so soon—"

"Look! look!" cried Lady Beltane, pressing his arm violently. "Look! What an extraordinary thing."

Philip turned and stared, as the crowd around him turned and stared too. Then there arose a murmur of exclamations and comments. "Why, it's the picture on the wall!" "How beautiful! Who is she?" "That's a real antique dress!" "And those ornaments—aren't they the Kesterton diamonds? Surely not?" "What's the lady's name?" "Miss Paston—Lady Kesterton's governess." "Lady Kesterton's governess! Then what does Sir Anthony mean by opening the ball with her?"

That certainly was a question repeated more often than any other. Philip asked it of himself also. What did Sir Anthony mean? The baronet had arrayed himself like his ancestor of a hundred and fifty years before; he might have figured as the father of the fair Elfrida, whose picture hung in full view upon the wall. And his partner, Elfrida herself, was dressed in the very costume that had been painted in the picture. Not a detail was wanting. The diamonds glittered on her neck; the rich brocade and laces were not wanting; and, more marvellous than all, the likeness between her and the portrait blazed forth unmistakably. What was equally unmistakable, also, was the likeness between her and Sir Anthony.

What did it all mean? Philip glanced round for Lady Kesterton. Her face was white with anger; her eyes glanced like blue steel. In spite of his dislike of her, Philip was a little sorry for the poor woman. He knew something of the hatred and jealousy that she had exhibited so often towards Elfrida; and he guessed that her husband's eccentric behavior caused real suffering to her. As to Sir Anthony, he preserved in perfection the calm, unruffled courtesy of manner for which (in public) he was renowned. He did not seem in any way disturbed by the whispers and comments which must have reached his ear. He looked complacently at his partner, and occasionally addressed a polite and smiling sentence to her. Elfrida, on the contrary, seemed more frightened than elated. To Philip it was very plain that she had been in some way trapped into her present position; probably it had never been in her mind when Sir Anthony offered her his arm that he had meant to dance with her. Her face was now flushed, now pale. From time to time she looked round, as if seeking for protection from some unknown danger.

Her eyes were widely-opened, and her lips trembled a little now and then. Nevertheless, she looked remarkably handsome, and the little trace of agitation which she betrayed was particularly becoming to her.

"What does that mean?" said Lord Beaulieu in Philip's ear. He was frowning in a way that was unusual to him. "What is old Kesterton about?"

"Heaven knows!" said Philip dryly. "But, after all, there is perhaps nothing strange in his choosing to dance with the most beautiful woman in the room!"

"She is that, isn't she?" said Lionel. "But, hang it all, I don't quite like it, you know. He's making her too remarkable. The dowagers are cackling like anything; and look at Lady Kesterton's face."

Yes, Philip had looked. He was glad when the quadrille was over, and the dance went on in more usual fashion. The first effect of Sir Anthony's proceeding was to render Elfrida at once the beauty of the ball. She was besieged by requests for a dance; and she would probably have been on her feet till three o'clock in the morning if Lady Kesterton had not intervened.

Philip, scenting danger, had managed to steer his course in Elfrida's direction as soon as the dance was over. Sir Anthony, evidently satisfied with his work, had gone away to another part of the room, and Elfrida was sitting on a little couch by the window, fanning herself. Philip reached her just in time to see Lady Kesterton cleave a way for herself among a little group of men who were hovering about the young lady, and to hear the words which she addressed to her.

"Miss Paston," she said, "I am extremely surprised to see you here. I was not aware that you had been invited to be present."

"I must refer you to Sir Anthony, Lady Kesterton," said Elfrida, very quietly.

"I shall not refer to Sir Anthony at all. I merely wish to state my opinion of your behavior. Your dress, too—it is exceedingly out of place in this house. I hope that you will see the advisability—"

"I hope, Lady Kesterton, that you will not forget that Miss Paston is at present in the position of your guest," said Philip in her ear. She started a little, and hesitated, then recovered herself and answered majestically, "Sir Anthony's guest, not mine. I have nothing to do with Miss Paston's appearance here. However, I shall leave all further discussion of the matter until tomorrow." And she swept away, leaving Elfrida angry and discomfited, with her eyes full of tears; and Philip in a greater rage than perhaps he had ever been conscious of in his life before.

"Never mind that ill-natured woman, Elfie," he bent down and whispered. "She is only angry because you look so beautiful. And nobody heard what she said—I took care of that. I kept the other fellows back."

This was not strictly true, but it brought comfort to Elfrida's heart.

"Did you really, Philip? How good of you! But indeed—indeed I think I had better run away and hide myself. It was Sir Anthony's doing—not mine. He came and fastened these diamonds into my dress, and he insisted on my dancing with him—I could not help it at all. I wish he had never done it!"

"I rather agree with you," said Philip, "but you had better not go away. It will only displease him, and it would not help you with Lady Kesterton. We must

talk the matter over to-morrow. Now don't let me keep you from the dancers."

"I shall not dance any more," said Elfrida; and she kept steadily to her word, although she caused consternation in the hearts of her admirers by her refusal. She sat out dance after dance, but unfortunately she did not by such means disarm Lady Kesterton's wrath; for she became more than ever the centre of a group of men, who were only too delighted to talk to her. Sir Anthony's behavior had aroused a host of rumors, some of which were as much to her advantage as others were to her discredit. The rumor most in favor was to the effect that she was a great heiress, masquerading as governess and poor relation simply from caprice—a rumor which brought more admirers to her feet than her beauty alone might have done.

Lord Beaulieu held rather moodily aloof for some time, and it was Lady Betty at last who, by a few well-chosen words, sent him to her side. "What does this all mean, Elfrida?" he said to her in a vexed tone, as soon as he got the chance of speaking without being overheard.

"I can't tell you, Lionel. I don't know in the least—but I think Sir Anthony means it kindly. Perhaps he remembers that it is my twenty-first birthday."

"And I never sent you a present. Poor little girl! Never mind, you shall have one yet. Did you get any presents to-day?"

"Henry gave me this gold bangle, and Lady Betty this ring," said Elfrida, with a happy smile and a blush. "And you sent me these roses, you know"—touching a bunch of flowers in her dress—"and Sir Anthony—"

"Well, Sir Anthony?"

"He told me I was to keep these ornaments," said Elfrida, looking down at the flashing pins that held the laces in their place. "They are very pretty and look like diamonds, don't they? But, of course, they must be paste?"

"Of course. I'm not so sure, though," said Lord Beaulieu, with a critical glance at the ornaments. How they flash! I believe they are diamonds, Elfie. And he told you to keep them? By Jove!"

He rooked as though he did not like the gift.

"Perhaps they belonged to some relation of yours," he said, after a few moments' reflection, "and he has had to give them to you when you came of age. They are exactly like some pins I have seen Lady Kesterton wear—"

"She has them on to-night," said Elfrida, eagerly.
"Oh, they must be only imitation, of course. I noticed the similarity."

"Sir Anthony is an old fool," Beaulieu muttered to himself; then, in a more audible voice: "I am going to take you down to supper, Elfie—mind that."

"Oh, no, Lionel, I shall only offend a lot more

people."

"I don't care for that. Sir Anthony is not going to be the only man who pays you attention. You will go in to supper with me, whatever Lady Kesterton may say," said Lord Beaulieu in a masterful tone.

But he had reckoned—in the most literal sense—without his host. When supper was ready he flew to claim his promise, and beheld to his amaze and dismay Sir Anthony walking down the room with Elfrida upon

his arm. Poor Elfrida's tell-tale face was crimson, and her eyes were full of tears; but all the same she was being walked off to the supper-room by Sir Anthony himself. Beaulieu smothered an exclamation of rage between his lips and went in with Lady Betty.

Sir Anthony had insisted on what he called "an old-fashioned supper," where covers were laid for every guest. It was towards the close of a meal which was certainly the most uncomfortable at which Elfrida had ever been present, that he rose from his seat, and begged in the most amiable way possible to be allowed to say a few words. He looked so happy and beamed upon his guests so benevolently that there was really some foundation for his wife's secret belief that he thoroughly enjoyed the discomfort that he had created.

"You may be surprised to hear," he went on genially, "that this is a birthday ball. This announcement was not publicly made beforehand for certain reasons of my own; but I take this opportunity, when my friends are all gathered together, of making known to them the young lady in honor of whose twenty-first birthday they have been invited to this house." It was noticed that at this point Lady Kesterton turned deadly white and seemed in imminent danger of falling in a swoon from a chair. Sir Anthony turned gracefully to Elfrida, who sat beside him, and laid his hand paternally on her shoulder. "Let me introduce to you all," he said, "my—"

What was the noise that broke upon Sir Anthony's measured words? Who was it that dared to break into the midst of that stately company, with stammering lips and horror-stricken eyes? And what was it he said?

"Oh, sir—Sir Anthony, sir—please stop—the west wing's on fire, and we can't none of us get to Mr. Henry's room."

The glass dropped from Sir Anthony's hand and fell to the ground, shivered into a thousand fragments. The peroration to his speech was never heard.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE END OF A FARCE.

In a moment all was bustle and confusion. The guests rose to their feet: some made for the door, some of the more timid turned even towards the windows. There were some faint shrieks and sobs from the women; one lady fainted in her chair. Even Sir Anthony, it was noticed, turned deadly pale and staggered as if he would have fallen. But Philip Winyates' voice rose in clear though hurried tones above the hubbub.

"It is in the west wing only, and there is no immediate danger to this end of the house. The ladies had better stay here; the men who will help, follow me."

And forthwith he dashed away, eagerly followed by a crowd of men and, in spite of his advice, by several of the women. Elfrida and Lady Betty had already disappeared.

The supper-room was on the east side of the house, and the gallery had been deserted while the banquet was at its height; hence the fact that the fire had been allowed to gain ground for some little time without being perceived. It seemed to have originated in the room between the kitchens and the suite occupied by Henry Paston, probably from some over-heating of the flues. When it was at length discovered, all possibility of reaching Henry's room by means of the corridor and staircase from the kitchen was over; and the picture-gallery was so full of blinding smoke that it seemed

impracticable to get to it that way. No fire-engine could be obtained without long delay; and although some contrivance of an old-fashioned nature for extinguishing fire existed upon the place, there was difficulty in getting it to work. The gardeners, with their great garden hose, were more useful than any one else could be.

"The house will burn like tinder if the fire reaches the older part." This was what the men whispered to each other with pale faces and anxious eyes. "And what about that young fellow in the west wing?"

"The garden-door—the side staircase"—those were the words that passed from Philip's lips to Lord Beaulieu's ears. The two were side by side, straining every nerve to reach the place they named by the roundabout way that they were obliged to take. Both knew the danger that would be incurred in opening that side door and letting in a draught of air that might lash the flames to sudden fury; but both were ready to take any risk, to go through any danger, for the sake of the lad they loved. The thought of Elfrida as a motive was at that moment almost scorned by them. Was it not enough that Henry Paston was a living human being in dire extremity?

A little crowd had gathered outside that part of the building known as the west wing; water was being spouted at the smoking windows, but it seemed terribly ineffectual. There was a fitful red light in one of the rooms. Whether the fire had spread throughout was a matter of uncertainty. There was no time to lose when Philip and Lionel appeared upon the scene.

"Shall we try it?" said Beaulieu to his friend. Philip simply nodded, and threw off his velvet mantle and useless velvet cap as he spoke; while Lionel tossed

away as many of his gay trappings as he could get rid of in haste. They took the precaution of covering their mouths with wet handkerchiefs, and then they burst open the garden-door, whence a rush of hot air and smoke sent the crowd further back for a moment, but did not cause the two young men to pause.

"I'll go alone—go back," Philip said abruptly to Beaulieu; but Lionel answered with equal curtness: "One alone can't manage it; it will be difficult to carry him down."

And then they disappeared into the house, followed by a long cry from Elfrida, who had rushed forward, begging to follow them. "Oh, let me go-let me save Henry! my poor Henry!" she cried, but she was forcibly held back, and obliged to remain quiescent. Betty clung to her, begging her to be calm, to be patient, that Lionel and Philip were sure to succeed; but her own lips were white, and her face expressed a depth of tragic misery which even Elfrida's could not transcend. Sir Anthony stormed up and down the space in front of the house in uncontrollable agitation, offering unheard-of sums to any one who would go and help in the rescue of the boy; but nobody ventured forward: it was thought that the two who had already gone would scarcely return. There was a few minutes' horrible suspense, that seemed like an eternity to those who awaited the issues of life and death.

It was a strange scene, for the night was bright and peaceful, though cold, and its tranquillity contrasted strongly with the agonizing intensity of this struggle of men with the powers of nature. Thick volumes of smoke rolled from the crackling windows; ominous red gleams showed themselves here and there, hissing

beneath the streams of water that were poured upon them. A sullen roar and a strange crackling sound proved that the flames were still at work, although they had not gained an overwhelming mastery. In the shadow of the trees a huddled group of frightened women and helpless men watched in hushed horror the progress of the fire. An occasional wail or sob broke from the women, a muttered word was exchanged between the men: otherwise all was still save for the roar and crackle of the fire.

Suddenly a shout went up from the throats of all men present. From the bewildering flame and smoke a figure had been seen to stumble forth—the figure of a man bearing a burden. He deposited it upon the grass, and then fell blindly down beside it. But in a minute or two he was able to sit up and speak. It was Lord Beaulieu, and he had rescued poor old Terry, who had been overcome by the smoke in trying to make her way to Henry's room. But where was Henry himself?—and where was Philip?

A louder shout than ever made itself heard as Philip Winyates, black with smoke, singed with fire, also strode forth at last with Henry's helpless form on a mattress in his strong arms. It had been a difficult and dangerous matter, indeed, to save him; and the difficulty was increased by Philip's consciousness of Henry's condition. A rough movement would, he knew, cause the lad intense agony at any time; how much more, then, when a shock to the nerves had been added, and the fear of death might make a man forget to be cautious and slow! And yet he had done his task with courage and pity; and the boy on his mattress was placed safely on the cool green grass outside the burning house. He

was insensible, certainly, but not a hair of his head had been singed. Philip was more in need of medical assistance than was he.

A doctor happened to be present among the guests, and he was at once called to the front by Sir Anthony, while Elfrida and Betty both bent tenderly over the fainting lad. Sir Anthony's agitation was marked in the extreme. His hands shook, his face was yellow and his lips livid in hue. His whole soul seemed to be absorbed in anxiety for Henry Paston. Every one commented on his demeanor with surprise. He had not a look or word now to spare for the burning house; he had scarcely a glance for Philip. The outer world was evidently a blank for him. He hung over Henry as eagerly as the girls themselves were doing, and would not be satisfied without the doctor's instant attention to him.

"It's impossible to be quite certain whether he is hurt or not until he can be examined thoroughly," the doctor said; "but we can at any rate try to restore consciousness. If it is only a simple faint he may be all right, Sir Anthony, but really," as Sir Anthony made an impatient exclamation, "it is impossible to say yet."

The restoratives that were applied produced their natural effect, however; and when Henry's eyes were once more open, and his face had recovered its usual tinge, the doctor advised that he should at once be carried out of the night air. It was reported at the same time that the fire was being got under, and it was considered safe to repair to the other end of the house, as there was now not the slightest likelihood of its spreading further.

The doctor then turned his attention once more to his

other patients, but one of them was beyond his aid. All efforts to revive poor Mrs. Terry had failed. She had fallen a victim to her love for the boy she had tended so long and so faithfully. It was in a supreme effort to reach his bedside that she had been overcome by the smoke, and had fallen to the ground, never to rise again. The doctor advised that the knowledge of her death should be kept from Henry until he had been seen by his own medical attendant; and he counselled also that Elfrida, who was very much shocked and grieved by Terry's death, should have no conversation with him at present. Henry was accordingly carried to the main portion of the house—for the first time in his life since the days of his babyhood.

"Where shall we take him, sir?" one of the servants had asked.

And to every one's infinite surprise, Sir Anthony had answered sharply:

"To my dressing-room, of course. All the bedrooms in the house are full. Here, Phil, you know more about his ways than any one else—I hope you are not hurt, by the way—can't you come and look after him a little?"

"Mr. Winyates' hands want binding up, Sir Anthony; one of them is severely burnt," said the doctor.

"Don't come, Phil; I can tell them what to do," Henry's faint voice was heard to murmur. Then—in a firmer voice—"Where is Terry? Is Terry hurt? She looks after me better than any one else."

"Presently, my boy, presently; she's a little overcome, and must be left quiet for a time," said the sur geon; and Henry, with one shuddering glance around him which made his friends fear that he had already divined the truth, hid his face with the rug that had been thrown over him and was borne quietly away, Sir Anthony following in the rear of the procession.

By degrees the excitement and confusion abated. The fire was now only smouldering, but had to be watched lest it should break forth anew. The crowd of gazers dispersed, and the guests who lived in the neighborhood stole quietly away, while those who were staying in the house gathered in each other's room to discuss the events of the evening. Now that the fire had turned out to be nothing very serious (for the death of poor old Terry did not count for much in the eyes of Lady Kesterton's fine friends), a general sense of injury began to make itself felt. Sir Anthony was not popular, and had rendered himself more unpopular than ever by his actions of that night. The way in which he had distinguished Elfrida Paston was incomprehensible, if she were only what she had hitherto seemed to be. And if not, who was she? That was the very question that was on the point of being solved, when the fire broke out and put an end to Sir Anthony's speech. "One would imagine," said an impatient lady, "that he had prepared the fire beforehand! It was really quite too apropos. But I suppose he will tell us to-morrow morning."

"Why don't you ask the girl herself?" asked one of the impatient lady's friends.

"I did, and she stared at me with her great eyes and declared that she did not know. Do you believe it?"

"What does Lady Kesterton say?"

"I have not had a word with her since the alarm of fire; she went into violent hysterics then, and has been in her room ever since they found that she might be taken there safely. But I don't believe she knows. There always was some mystery about those Pastons, though I believe it is well known that their mother was a mere peasant woman."

"It's a most extraordinary affair. What a pity the fire broke out just then! In another moment we should have known."

"Unless the girl is *really* somebody, it was an insult to the county to put her at the head of the table and lead the quadrille," said one lady, in a very dry and unpleasant voice.

"But Sir Anthony would not be so mad as all that!" cried one of her friends; and there the discussion ended, for there was really no more to be said.

Meanwhile Elfrida was crying herself to sleep in Lady Betty's arms; for it was Betty who had come to her rescue and saved her from the feeling of hopelessness and homelessness which would have inevitably supervened on the excitements and disasters of the evening but for Betty's gentle care. There was no one else to look after her; none of the servants had ever waited upon her except Terry, and now that poor Terry was gone Elfrida was desolate indeed. The west wingher home and place of refuge—was uninhabitable, and there was no bedroom left empty in the whole house, which had been packed full of visitors for the ball. But Lady Betty bore Elfrida away to her own blue-andwhite room, undressed her, put her to bed, and consoled her as well as she could. "And after all," she said, "Henry is safe—and Beaulieu, and Mr. Winyates. So have we not a good deal to be thankful for?"

"Yes, I know," Elfrida sobbed, "but poor Terry—I cannot help thinking of poor Terry."

She slept at last, however. It was Betty who stayed

awake and pondered over the complications of the past and future.

Philip had helped, in spite of his injured hand, in settling Henry in his new apartment. The camp bed-stead in Sir Anthony's dressing-room was more comfortable than such bedsteads usually are—perhaps because everything belonging to Sir Anthony was sure to be a trifle more luxurious than if it belonged to anybody else in the house. He sat with the lad until Henry seemed to be asleep, and then he stole noiselessly away, meeting Sir Anthony prowling about the passages as he went. The baronet stopped him, putting a finger on his arm, and looking him straight in the face.

"Is he asleep?"

"I think so," said Philip, gravely.

He would have passed on, but Sir Anthony held him still.

"I owe you a debt, Phil."

"Do you, sir?"

"You are very short in your rejoinders. Don't you know what I mean? If that boy had died in the fire—"

His voice shook a little. He broke off, withdrew his fingers from Philip's arm, and looked away.

"I was not aware, sir," said Philip, with stiff abruptness, "that you cared whether Henry Paston was alive or dead."

"You were mistaken, then. I care a good deal."

"You take an extraordinary way of showing it," said Phil, who could not resist the opportunity of displaying an exasperation of anger which had been growing upon him throughout the evening. His remark seemed to have the effect of bringing Sir Anthony back to one ofhis more usual moods. He turned toward Philip again, and laughed in his mocking, sarcastic way.

"It has been excellent fooling," he said. "I have tricked the whole world—you and my wife and all. I have laughed at you in my sleeve. It has been an excellent jest, and I have enjoyed it thoroughly."

"Have the others enjoyed it—those on whom the

jest has been played?" asked Philip sternly.

"Ah, I can't help that," said Sir Anthony, with a shrug of his shoulders. "But"—with an intent look at Philip—"it's time the farce was ended now. I have had enough of it. It is played out."

"It would have ended to-night, I suppose, but for this outbreak of fire. You were about to tell us—"

"Ah, yes, I was about to say something, was I not?" said Sir Anthony, with indifference. "Well, you will hear all about it in course of time. You may wait a little longer now, as you did not hear it to-night."

"Considering my affection for Elfrida—" Philip began with passion, but he was interrupted by Sir Anthony's cackling, sneering laugh.

"Your affection must bear a little strain. Not that your affection"—with scornful emphasis—"is a reason with me for speaking or keeping silence: it weighs next to nothing, sir, let me tell you, with me. You will not marry Elfrida: there is a much more brilliant destiny in store for her. I shall see her Lady Beaulieu, I hope, before I die."

He hobbled away, holding his dressing-gown tightly round him, and laughing to himself as he went down the long passage. Philip looked after him for a minute or two with a sensation of mingled rage and despair. He could not fathom his cousin's meaning in the least;

but he had a distinct conviction that the meaning was not altogether a benevolent one. He felt as if he and Elfrida and Henry were all at this old man's mercy. Their misery or their happiness depended entirely upon his caprice.

Sir Anthony had been to inspect the scene of the fire once more, and having assured himself that there was no likelihood of its breaking out again, came back to his dressing-room. The scent of fire and smoke was still in his nostrils, and he was glad to escape from it to the perfumed warmth of his own domicile. His dressing-room, as we have mentioned before, formed one of a suite of rooms, of which it was the last. Next to it came his bedroom, then a little sitting-room communicating with Lady Kesterton's apartments. Sir Anthony went first into the sitting-room, and glanced at the door of his wife's room. All here was silent: the door was shut, and no gleam of light came from beneath it. He nodded, as if well satisfied; then walked through his bedroom into the dressing-room, closing, but not absolutely shutting, the doors behind him. The light was dim, for the fire, although heaped high with coal, gave out only a dull red glow, and the lamp was turned down to a mere glimmer. Sir Anthony shaded his candle with his hand and looked toward the low, narrow bed in the corner. Was the boy asleep?

He seemed to be, for no sound or movement could be distinguished. Sir Anthony drew nearer, with slow and—almost, it seemed—reluctant footsteps; so near that he could see the delicate, pain-lined face upon the white pillow. Some thought of the past, perhaps, made his brow contract as he looked at the beautiful,

worn features, the tossed golden hair, the feverish color in the thin cheeks. He stood and gazed—fascinated, irresolute—not knowing whether to turn away or to disturb the sleeper, as he half wished to do. The problem was solved for him without his own will. The blueveined eyelids quivered a little, and then were lifted from the dreamy violet eyes; the boy's lip quivered with something like a faint smile as he murmured—

"I am awake. Did you want me?"

Sir Anthony set down his candle. "I think—after all—I have been wanting you for the last eighteen years," he said, with a touch of enigmatic grimness, "and never found it out till now."

There was an instant's pause, and in the stillness a distant timepiece was heard to strike the hour. It was four o'clock.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ROUTED.

"What does it all mean? Have I been dreaming?" said Henry, in a strange, bewildered way. "I thought Terry was here."

"No, Terry is not here: she is resting," said Sir Anthony in a softened voice. "Go to sleep again, if you can. Is there anything I can get you?"

"Oh, no, thank you." He was wide awake now. "I remember," he said, "there was a fire and I heard Terry calling for help." He turned suddenly upon Sir Anthony. "She is hurt—I know she is or she would have come to me before now—poor old Terry! Perhaps she is dead. Oh, please tell me. I must know."

"Don't disturb yourself," said Sir Anthony soothingly. "She's all right. You must put up with me for a nurse to-night—that's all. The house is in confusion, and there's no place for you to sleep in but this room. We could hardly do with any one else here too, could we?" he added, with a smile.

The boy listened, only half convinced. "I feel as if something were wrong," he muttered to himself. "Perhaps it is only my fancy—"

"Of course it is only your fancy. At least perhaps I should not say so when the west wing is half burnt down, and the ball has been spoiled, to say nothing of the supper and my speech."

"The ball?" Henry repeated. "Wasn't it over?"

"Not half over. Are you comfortable, boy?"

"May I have a drink of water?"

Sir Anthony marched away in search of the carafe, and brought it with an odd smile upon his lips. He did not often wait upon anybody, he was reflecting; indeed, he did not often wait upon himself. Here was a change in his habits; he was pouring out water for this boy, and, curiously enough, he liked doing it. So small a service would hardly have been noticeable in an ordinary man; but Sir Anthony's ingrained selfishness had made little efforts appear great to himself.

"I ought not to have troubled you—is there no one else here?" said Henry, as he took the tumbler from Sir Anthony's hand. Then, rather timidly: "I'm afraid I ought to be lifted up—I can't drink it like this. Never mind, I can do without the water very well."

"Can't I lift you up?" asked Sir Anthony. "There's no one else here. I think I could manage it if I tried."

"Thank you. If you don't mind, then. Just put your arm under my shoulders and lift me up a little way—that's it. Thank you so much. I think you do it even better than Terry, although she's had so much practice."

It is a law of human nature that we feel more kindly disposed than before toward the person to whom we have rendered even a small service; and Sir Anthony formed no exception to this rule. He looked at Henry almost tenderly as he laid him back upon his couch.

"You are easy to lift," he said. Then he took a chair by the bedside and sat down, leaning one elbow on his knee, and his chin upon his hand. Henry watched the sharp profile, darkly silhouetted against the red firelight, for several minutes in silence. Presently he spoke, but this time almost in a whisper.

"You are very kind," he said. "You have always been very kind to me. I wish that I might ask you a question."

"You may ask what you like. I need not answer."

"In the early part of the evening I heard that you had made Elfrida dance with you—before anybody else. Every one was talking about it. The servants came and told Terry; and Terry told me."

"Ah! Well, that is true enough. What then?"

"I want to know why you did it."

Sir Anthony stroked his chin, and his thin lips relaxed into a malicious smile.

"A host, young man, may surely please himself as to his partners?"

"No, that's exactly what he ought not to do," said Henry quickly. "He should put his likes and dislikes on one side, and think only of what will give pleasure to the guests."

"Oh, so you know that much of a host's duties, do you? But I choose—sometimes—to set my duties aside and please myself. I wanted to dance with the prettiest girl in the room, and that happened to be Elfrida. Now you know all about it, and you had better go to sleep."

"I shall not sleep yet," said the boy, with a gentle persistence that even Sir Anthony found it difficult to withstand; "and I so seldom see you that I should like to talk a little if you don't mind. Unless you were thinking of going to bed yourself just now?"

"Not yet. I am like you—not sleepy. What else do you want to know?"

"Why you did it, sir. Because you must know that it would expose Elfie to ill-natured remarks."

"You are bold," said Sir Anthony, dryly. "Well, suppose I did—what then?"

"You must have had a reason. You would not willingly do her an injury."

Sir Anthony looked at the boy as if to detect some trace of sarcasm in his face or voice, but after a long gaze he turned back reassured. Sarcasm had no place in Henry's gentle eyes.

"Why do you say that?" asked the baronet, after a prolonged pause. "What reason have you to suppose that I would not do her—and you too—an injury if I saw fit?"

Henry put out his hand and touched Sir Anthony's lean wrist as it lay on the bedclothes—the movement was in itself a caress. "You are too good," he said.

Sir Anthony muttered something under his breath. Was it a curse or blessing? "You don't know me, boy," he said immediately afterward. "You are the last person on earth who has cause to say that! No, listen—do not contradict. You know very well it was I who laid you here—my blow (for it was a blow, though I have never owned it before), given in a fit of passion, made you a cripple, my poor lad! And your mother. Good God! it's enough to make her turn in her grave to hear you calling me 'good'!" There were few people on earth who had seen Sir Anthony so much moved.

"I don't see why," said Henry simply. "Of course I knew about the—the push. I don't believe you meant to strike me, and the results were entirely accidental. It might have happened to any one. But what you did was not what 'any one' would have done afterward; for

you have done your best ever since to give me as much rest and ease as could be got for me; you have done a tremendous amount for me, and for Elfie too, and I am grateful. You see I always understood how you felt—that you were sorry for me, I mean; and I have wanted for a long time to tell you that I knew."

To say that Sir Anthony was thunderstricken and confounded by these words would be understating the truth. He had never been so completely taken aback in his life. This boy—this invalid lad—of whom he had thought so little, to whom he had been contemptuously and angrily generous rather than kind, had penetrated his motives, had judged him, had forgiven him, as a superior would have done, yet with perfect simplicity and tenderness. A rush of new emotion filled Sir Anthony's heart. Perhaps for the first time in his life he felt both gratitude and contrition.

He put out his fingers and grasped the slender hand, which still touched his wrist.

"You don't know half," he said, rather hoarsely, "or you would not speak to me as you do, Harry. Boy, don't you know that I broke your mother's heart?"

He felt the boy's pulses leap and race forward like a startled horse.

"If you did"—the answer was low and tremulous—"I am quite certain she forgave you, Sir Anthony."

"I know she did, which makes the case all the worse for me," said Sir Anthony sharply. "She was true and faithful enough, poor soul. It would have been better for you, Henry, if you had had Elfrida's face. Whenever I looked at yours your mother seemed to reproach me from your eyes."

"I know that it is only since I grew up that you have

been able to look at me. I noticed that years ago. But how—why—"

He stopped short in sudden distress and embarrassment. He wanted to know how it came about that Sir Anthony had had power to break his mother's heart.

"You had better not ask too many questions," said Sir Anthony, in somewhat agitated tones, "or you will perhaps hear more than you bargain for. But—yes, there is something I will tell you—because you have trusted me, boy. Scarcely any one else has trusted me since she died. You were right in one thing: I was not intending to do Elfrida an injury to-night. I meant only to repair an injustice. If things had gone well—if it had not been for that unlucky, that accursed fire, every one would have known the truth by this time, although it has been hidden for so many years."

Henry lay still; he was trembling from head to foot, and could not speak. Sir Anthony, absorbed in his own thoughts, took no notice of his agitation, but continued to speak—rather to himself than to the boy.

"Yes, I meant to tell the truth to-night. I had fixed the date for a good many years. On Elfrida's twenty-first birthday, I had long said, I would set matters straight. Tricking the world was amusing enough for a time, but I wanted to see its face when it found out the trickery. My lady had been cheated as well as everybody else, and I should have liked to see her face when she was undeceived. It would have been rare sport, I tell you. But the fire spoilt my calculations, and I never amazed the world, as I meant to do, by my little announcement. Curse it all! One would think sometimes that there was a Fate somewhere that laid itself out to spoil one's arrangements."

He lapsed into an abstracted silence, but when this had lasted some time Henry managed to find voice. "What did you mean to tell them, to-night, then?" he asked breathlessly.

Sir Anthony woke up from his reverie, turned and looked at him and gently tapped the thin hand with his finger.

"It concerns you, too," he said, "as well as Elfrida. More than Elfrida, after all. Haven't you guessed it yet? Don't you know that you two are my eldest son and daughter, lawfully begotten of my wife, Mary, once Mary Derrick, and known afterward as Mary Paston? You will be Sir Henry Kesterton when I die, and Elfrida is heiress to her grandmother's money and jewels. Those brats of my lady's are penniless. . . . There's the secret for you, my boy, that I meant to make known to-night."

A strange gasping sound made itself heard in the room. A wild, dishevelled figure stood at the halfclosed door. Henry lay motionless, unable to speak, almost unable to breathe, while Sir Anthony, slowly turning his head, smiled in almost diabolical fashion to see that his wife was present and had heard his every word. He rose from his seat and made her a low bow. All his better feelings seemed to have vanished; he was again the man that the world knew-cynical, heartless, and indifferent. Otherwise he would have had some compassion for the gray-faced woman who stood clutching at the door-post, seeking to steady herself in the terrible faintness that had come over her when she learned for the first time the true story of her husband's past, and the real position of her children. But there was nothing but malicious triumph in Sir Anthony's face.

"I could not have desired a better audience," he said.
"I have produced part, at least, of the sensation that I desired to make. And I congratulate you, madam, on the honorable means you take to procure information."

It seemed at first as if Lady Kesterton could not articulate a word; but she gasped out a broken sentence or two at the end of her husband's speech.

"It's a lie! It's a lie!" she exclaimed. "You say it to vex me—to torture me. You saw me standing there, and you invented the lie!"

"On the contrary," said Sir Anthony, pleasantly, "I have simply told the truth, which has been the truth any time these two-and-twenty years. I married Mary Derrick with all due forms and ceremonies, I can assure you, and my daughter Elfrida was born about twelve months afterward. My son and heir, Henry, is, as you know, a little younger. It would have been an agreeable surprise for our guests if I had been able to carry out my little plan and introduce Elfrida to them under her proper name, would it not?"

"I don't believe a single word of it," said Lady Kesterton, who had by this time recovered her breath, but was still livid with rage. "And if it were true—mind, I say only if it were true—you would be a perfect fiend, Anthony, and would bring down on yourself the reprobation of all England."

"Do you think I care for that?" said her husband, coolly. "Don't you know by this time that I rather enjoy provoking my countrymen's indignation? It is nothing to me what the world thinks. Would the world's reprobation alter the facts? The facts are that Henry and Elfrida are my two eldest children, and that

your beloved Janey and Gerald are paupers, my lady, as you will be too if I choose."

"No, no," said Henry, speaking for the first time, but with vigor and decision such as no one had heard him use before. "If this is true, father"—he said the word with sudden tenderness—"if this is really true, then you know that all the more consideration is needed for Janey and Gerald. You know very well that they shall not come off badly if Elfie and I can help it."

"Ay, ay, the cockerel can crow on occasions, it seems!" was Sir Anthony's comment—made, however, in no unfriendly tones. "Well, you shall have your way, Harry—you've had little enough of it hitherto. You shall dower Janey and give Gerald a younger son's portion, if you please—and then perhaps you will teach my lady to be ashamed of the slights and insults she has heaped upon you both. I have seen them all, and meant to requite them, but I bided my time. I knew the day would come when my lady would be only too glad to eat her own words, to lick the dust for her precious children's sake—"

"I will not listen to your coarse insults, Sir Anthony!" said Lady Kesterton, quivering from head to foot. "And as to your insolent offers of help, you wretched cripple, I would die sooner than take a penny from your hands. I would beg my bread from door to door sooner than be beholden to you. If this is true, I will leave the house to-morrow—to-day I should say—for I will never live in a place where my children are to be considered inferior to a common servant's children. I always believed them to be yours, but I never thought that you would have the audacity to foist them upon

me as your legitimate offspring. The house will not hold them and me any longer."

"Very well," said Sir Anthony, "I dare say we can exist without you. But I doubt whether, under the circumstances, the courts would give you custody of the children. If you go, therefore, you will leave them behind—to my daughter's guardianship."

Lady Kesterton wrung her hands. "Anthony, you are cruel—cruel and wicked! My children! my children!" And then she broke down and sobbed, though without a single tear in her burning eyes.

"Lady Kesterton," began Henry, earnestly, but not perhaps very wisely, "believe me—"

"Believe you!" she cried, turning upon him fiercely. "I will believe you as soon as I will believe him, you false, cringing, fair-spoken wretch, as crooked in body as your father is crooked in soul! You have concocted this plot between you to keep my children out of their right; but you will find that I can be a match for you yet! There is not a man or woman who has been at this ball last night but will swear that you are mad, Sir Anthony Kesterton-mad to set the prejudices of the world at defiance, and behave as wildly as you did! Who knows but that it was you yourself who set fire to the west wing? I myself heard it suggested-I believe it is true. And when you are shut up in a mad-house, and this wretched lad is sent to prison or the workhouse, I don't care which, then we will see who is to be the master of Kesterton."

"It will not be your son, at any rate," said Sir Anthony, with a sneer. "I shall take care of that. You are more likely to be locked up than I, my lady, if you go on raving at that rate. But you have done for your-

self and for your children. Not a penny shall they touch, either in my lifetime or after it, and their brother shall not help them. They shall be beggars, madam"—his voice rising to a hoarse cry of wrath as he proceeded—"and if they were starving in the streets I would not give them or you a crust. Leave this room! You shall never enter it again. It is my first wife and my first wife's children whom I mean to honor now."

He raised his gaunt arm so threateningly as he spoke that Lady Kesterton fled in terror. He stalked after her for a few steps, then waited at the door until he heard her lock herself into her room. At that sound his anger seemed to evaporate. He broke into a low, discordant laugh, and turned gleefully to the bed.

"Routed!" he said. "Routed—with great loss. But she deserves it, if only for her conduct to you."

He spoke to Henry, but Henry did not hear. He had fainted away, and it took Sir Anthony some time, and gave him some odd qualms of remorse and anxiety before he could restore the boy to consciousness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SHADOW OF SIN.

As soon as Lady Kesterton had gained her own room, she cast herself down on the bed and wept bitterly; but she was not a woman to whom tears were easy or natural. Before long she was pacing the floor with agitated, uneven steps, with burning eyes and clinched hands, revolving in her own mind various schemes for defeating the plot which she declared to herself had been concocted in order to ruin her children's chances in the world.

She said this to herself, but as a matter of fact she did not believe it. She had had quite enough experience of Sir Anthony's ways to know that he was not likely to take the trouble to concoct anything. She was certain in her own mind that he had spoken the truth. She had been befooled all these years, and on the morrow all the world would know that she had been befooled. She had paraded her boy as the heir of Kesterton Park: all her friends knew how proud she had been of him, and how she had rejoiced in his prospects. All her friends knew how bitterly she had hated the Pastons, and how glad she had always been to injure and humiliate them in every possible way. And now they turned out to be Sir Anthony's eldest legitimate children, after all, and her children would have to take a lower place. Her children would be penniless, unless Sir Anthony chose to enrich them. She knew the terms

of Lady Kesterton's will by heart. It was to Anthony's eldest boy and girl that the old lady had bequeathed her wealth; and hitherto Sir Anthony's wife had been happy in the thought that Gerald and Janey would benefit by that will. But to see Elfrida in Janey's place, to see Henry some day wearing the title which Gerald ought to have worn—this seemed to Lady Kesterton a perfectly intolerable state of things.

In the cold fury of her mood she still said to herself that she would not live in the house a day longer if Henry and Elfrida were to take her children's places. But she knew in her heart that independent action was next door to impossible. She had a liberal settlement, and she did not suppose that Sir Anthony would carry out his threat of driving her from the house; but she was sure that he would not let her take the children away, and she could not but confess to herself that life would be nothing to her without Janey and Gerald. It was chiefly for their sake that she felt Sir Anthony's revelation so keenly. It was their loss that she grieved over, or so at least she told herself. If Gerald were ever to be master of the house, she knew that she, his mother, would still have the dignity and consideration of a great lady, even when Sir Anthony was dead. Lady Kesterton had no illusions about her husband. She knew very well that he was much less strong than he imagined himself to be; that he might die at any moment—his doctor had told her so. She was not particularly anxious about him, and she would not be sorry when he died. But oh, what a difference it would make to her if he were to die and Henry take his place! Henry's house could be no home of hers; and she hated Henry accordingly. It was a horrible downfall.

All that could have softened such a blow was wanting. If there had been any kindliness of feeling between Elfrida and herself, any pity for Henry, any sympathy or tenderness, matters would not have been half as bad. But there had been nothing of the kind. Ever since she first entered the house she had scorned the helpless creatures who were dependent to some extent upon her mercy. She had snubbed and humiliated Elfrida; she had treated Henry with systematic carelessness and neglect. If Sir Anthony had not compelled her to do his bidding, she would have denied them house-room, clothing, teaching-all the things that their father had provided for them, if he had done nothing else. Of Henry's character she knew little, for she had scarcely ever spoken to him; but between herself and Elfrida there was something almost like enmity—a passionate sense of wrong on the one side balanced by a cold, contemptuous dislike upon the other.

Then, to add to her unhappiness, she had never before realized how completely Sir Anthony had always distrusted her. She did not love him; no element of wounded affection entered into her bitterness; but she was a proud woman, and she did not like to feel that she had never been taken into her husband's confidence. All the world, too, would know this now. All the world would know that she had been tricked and duped, and that Sir Anthony had been laughing at her in his sleeve all the while. As she thought of this she felt that she hated Sir Anthony. She had hated a good many people in her life—she had a great capacity for hatred—but seldom had she hated any one so intensely as she hated her husband now. She sat with dry eyes and tightly-clasped hands, wishing with all her heart that

he was dead. She wished for Henry's death, too, but she wished most of all that Anthony Kesterton were dead and buried, and out of her poor little Gerald's way.

She had no notion how dangerous was the line which her thoughts were taking. She had always considered herself a moral and religious woman; she was indeed only a very conventional one. Hitherto her conventionality had kept her within ordinary bounds; she had not really wanted to do anything that the world would have condemned. But in her heart Lady Kesterton never balanced the claims of "right" and "wrong." She did the things that seemed expedient to her, and thought that the end sanctified the means. This worked well as long as her life was untouched by any great passion, by any great temptation; but when the hidden forces of her nature were let loose, and there was no habit of restraint, who could tell what evil might not be the result?

And now she awoke for the first time to the consciousness of passions that were stronger than herself—elemental forces which had hitherto been concealed beneath the silken exterior of her daily life. Mother-love, which had once seemed so beautiful and so innocent, suddenly became something stronger and fiercer than the hunger of a wild beast for blood. Hatred, a power which she had veiled under the names of justice and uprightness, worked like a fever in her veins. She was dominated by the two passions, and love, pity, mercy, were as though they had never been. She felt as if she could have gladly taken Henry by the throat and strangled him rather than let him come between her little son and his good fortune. This course of action was, fort-

unately, an impossibility. Was there anything else that could be done?

Fraud and cunning might perhaps achieve her end. It would perhaps be better for her children if she went to Sir Anthony and humbled herself, asked his pardon for the bitter words that she had uttered, and made interest for her children with Henry and Elfrida. Her soul sickened at the thought of abasing herself in this way, and yet—yet for her children's sake she was ready to do it. She might soften Sir Anthony by her pleading so far as to make him hide the fact that she had not been in his confidence; and she might induce him to take back what he had said about disinheriting Janey and Gerald. Surely, if she were very humble, very penitent, he would consent to give them the usual portion of younger children in the Kesterton family! She would do anything for their sakes.

Full of these thoughts, she rose, resolving to go at once to Sir Anthony. She must see him before she faced the world. He might be asleep, but he slept little as a rule, and, if he had not taken his sleeping draught, might still be sitting up, or lying awake brooding over his projects for the morrow. Although he had driven her from his presence with flaming eyes and words of wrath, she was not afraid to go back to his room. Eva Kesterton was by no means a coward. She opened her door; the little sitting-room was dark. She crossed it softly, pushed open the further door, and peeped into Sir Anthony's bedroom. Here a lamp was lighted, and a fire burned low; but the room was empty. Sir Anthony was still with Henry, and she could not venture to disturb him there.

"Is he not coming to bed at all to-night, then?" said

Lady Kesterton, advancing a few steps into the room and looking around her with a feeling of angry defeat. She had never thought of finding him away. "Surely he will come soon—he will want a little rest!" She listened for a moment, and heard a clock strike five. A new day would soon begin, and something must be done, something must be decided before the dawn. With morning would come the proclamation to the world of the most crushing failure of her life. Oh, if she could only silence Sir Anthony's lips before the day began!

She turned her eye toward his bed, and to the little table at the bedside; and if an observer had been by, he would have seen that her face became suddenly of a deadly whiteness. She stood for a minute or two like one turned to stone, and then began to tremble—stood there trembling like one upon whom has fallen the shadow of a mortal fear.

For the first time in her life a great temptation had come in her way.

It was a desperate thing that she thought of: an expedient which at a calmer moment would never have occurred to her. She had said to herself a little while before that she wished Sir Anthony was dead. Dead before he could blazon his secret to the world; dead before he could take her child's inheritance and give it to another. Yes, she wished he would die—die before the morning. And there, on the table beside the bed, might be found the means of accomplishing her end. On the table there was a fluted blue bottle which contained enough chloral to send him into a sleep from which there would be no awaking. If he would but take it—if she could but give him a little overdose—things might go smoothly for her and her children yet.

She saw with a supernally quickened eye how easily the thing could be brought about. He took his draught whenever he wanted to sleep; perhaps, however, he would not want to sleep that night. But there was a cup of cold milk upon the table; this he was quite sure to drink. During the past few weeks, as Lady Kesterton well knew, Sir Anthony's sense of taste had been curiously deadened. A bad cold seemed to have destroyed the sensitiveness of his palate, and the faculty of taste had not returned when the cold was cured. This absence of discrimination as regarded tastes would be her safeguard. Even if the milk had an unusual flavor, he would probably not notice it. And if the dregs in the glass were examined next day, it would be nothing unusual to find chloral in them. It would simply be supposed that he had taken a larger dose than usual. The only danger would be if he happened to know how much chloral there had been in the blue bottle the night before. He might notice that a large quantity of it had gone; and he might take alarm—and make inquiries. But, on the whole, it was not very likely that this would come to pass.

And the advantage? What would that be? It crossed her mind that some one in the world must surely know the story of Sir Anthony's first marriage. Was there no lawyer or clergyman who was aware of the truth? Lady Kesterton remembered that the old solicitor, Watson, had always looked at her with strange, doubtful, curious eyes. But he was dead, and his successor had never possessed Sir Anthony's confidence. No, there was a chance—a very good chance—that the marriage could not be substantiated after Sir Anthony's death. Henry's testimony would go for nothing—it

could easily be disposed of—and her boy, Gerald, would have "his rights." Or, if not, at any rate, Anthony would be no longer there to jeer at her, to enjoy his triumph, to slight her and her children! How she hated him at that moment! How she longed to see him lying dead!

Long as these thoughts take to transcribe, they flashed with lightning speed through Lady Kesterton's mind. She stood still only for the space of about two minutes. Not one thought of pity, of conscience, or of God's law, held her back. She simply considered the possibility and the safety of the course she was about to take. And it seemed feasible enough—feasible and expedient. She was conscious of nothing so much as of a fierce and overmastering desire to triumph over Sir Anthony, if only by seeing him lie dead before her while she still lived to have her wicked way.

It was a mad act; one which could scarcely escape detection, when executed by a woman so unskilled in crime as Lady Kesterton had been until that moment. But it was an act prompted by a rush of passion which she had no means of calming or controlling. These hidden forces of our natures, if unchecked, sometimes bring ruin in their wake.

Lady Kesterton crossed the room, quickly but silently. She took the blue bottle in her hand and poured its contents, with unwavering decision, into the cup of milk. Then she put the bottle into the pocket of her dressing-gown, and turned to leave the room. It was at that moment that Sir Anthony, hearing a sudden rustle, walked quietly to the door of the dressing-room and looked at her.

He had not seen her previous movements. He sim-

ply saw her leave his table; she did not look round until she reached the door. Then she glanced toward the dressing-room and saw him regarding her with a grim smile upon his features. She was utterly terrified, for she believed that he had seen all that she had done. She did not, however, attempt to speak. She uttered a faint shriek and rushed back to her own room as if all the Furies of Justice and Revenge were at her heels. There she locked the door, and flung herself face downward upon the floor. Every moment she expected to hear his voice or his knuckles hammering at the panels. But no sound came. She lay quivering in every nerve until the gray dawn looked in at the windows, and certain noises from the outside world told her that the household was astir. Then she rose to her feet and crept into bed, hiding the bottle beneath her pillow in a desperate resolve to conceal it from everybody's eyes.

Sir Anthony glanced at the table, from which he felt convinced that she had taken something, then shrugged his shoulders and went back to Henry's bedside.

- "What is it?" the boy said faintly.
- "Only Lady Kesterton."
- "Does she want you? Don't let me keep you."
- "I am the last person she is likely to want. I suppose she cannot sleep—she has taken my chloral away with her."
 - "She won't-take-"
- "Too much? Not she. My lady always looks after her own safety. Oh, no, she wants a refreshing nap before morning—that is all."
 - "I think I shall sleep now," said Henry.
 - "Shall you, boy? Then I'll lie down and get a rest,

too. Philip said he would be in by seven. You're sure you won't want anything?"

"Quite sure, thank you." He was drowsy already—almost too drowsy to respond. Sir Anthony laid his hand for a moment on his son's forehead.

"Good-night, then—or rather, good-morning," he said. "But perhaps good-night is more appropriate. Good-night, my dear boy."

"Good-night-father." And then Henry was asleep.

"I may as well get asleep, too," reflected Sir Anthony, as he entered his own room. "Good thing I told them not to call me until I rang. Ha! here's my milk—I'll drink it before I lie down. I shall wake easily if Henry calls."

He drank the milk down at a draught, without noticing anything amiss; then leisurely finished undressing, and slipped quietly into bed. He felt unusually drowsy—he was glad to think that he would not have to appear next morning until he chose. Philip would see to Henry.

And then he slept.

The dark shadow that, to Henry's prevision, seemed to hover more deeply around Lady Kesterton than over any other man or woman in the house, was surely no shadow of misfortune, but of sin!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

It was not to be expected that any one in the house would be up early on the morning after such an exciting night. Even the servants slept late; and none of the guests appeared until nearly noon. Lady Kesterton's maid brought a message from her mistress to the effect that she was not well enough to appear at breakfast; and everybody declared that her indisposition was perfectly natural. "After such a trying day," as one lady sympathetically remarked, "it would be a wonder if poor Lady Kesterton were not upset."

The one exception to the rule of lateness that morning was in Philip's case. He entered the dressing-room at seven o'clock, as he had promised to do, and finding the boy tranquilly asleep, sat down by the fire with a book in his hand and read for an hour or two. Once he went to Sir Anthony's room and looked in. But Sir Anthony was also asleep; so Philip came back and closed the door of communication.

Henry did not awake until nine o'clock. Then Philip, with some difficulty, procured breakfast for him. After the meal he had the painful task of telling him of Terry's death. He was afraid that the lad might hear it from inconsiderate lips, and had decided that he must be told as early in the day as possible. Henry was much moved; he had suspected something amiss all along, in spite of

Sir Anthony's attempt to quiet him; and he mourned for his old nurse as if she had been his own kindred.

Of his conversation with Sir Anthony, he did not speak. He was secretly longing to discuss with Philip the communication that had been made to him; but a delicate sense of honor forbade him to open his lips without his father's permission. Sir Anthony would tell the world—it was not for the son to speak first. Besides, the gain to him would be loss to others; and therefore Henry thought it better to be silent. Not even to Elfrida, when she stole into the room, did he breathe a word about their changed position. He had complete faith in Sir Anthony. Sir Anthony would tell everything that should be told.

About noon Lord Beaulieu was heard inquiring for Sir Anthony, and was told by the valet that his master had said he was not to be disturbed. "Master's having a long sleep this morning, I dare say," said the man; "he was a good bit disturbed in the night, so I think he's just taken his draught and means to have it out. It's as much as my place is worth to go into Sir Anthony's room when he's ordered me not to disturb him, my lord." So Beaulieu could not press for admission.

It was not until two in the afternoon, when men were coming for orders and officials were waiting for instructions, that any anxiety began to be felt respecting Sir Anthony's non-appearance. The valet came to Philip first, with some doubt expressed upon his face. "If you please, sir," he said, "can you tell me what we are to do? It don't seem right for Sir Anthony to sleep so long. The doctor's here, sir; would you ask him to go in and look at master?"

"I should think it's all right, James," said Philip.

"Sir Anthony has very likely taken his sleeping-draught, and if so he ought not to be disturbed."

"Dr. Barclay might just take a look at him, sir," said James, almost pleadingly. For curious as it may seem, the man was attached to his master.

After a moment's hesitation, Philip went to the library, where he found Dr. Barclay, who had been the family physician for so many years, and to whom he expounded the state of the case. Dr. Barclay, now a white-headed old gentleman, with a benevolent red face, and gold-rimmed spectacles, nodded twice or thrice.

"Quite right, my dear Mr. Winyates, quite right. Somebody had better glance at Sir Anthony. His heart is a trifle weak, you know, and he has had a shock."

"But you don't imagine-"

"Not for a moment, not for a moment," said the doctor, anticipating the conclusion of Philip's speech, and holding up his plump white hands. "Sir Anthony is no doubt sleeping as peacefully as a child. At the same time, it cannot be denied that he has had a shock. Lady Kesterton has had a shock, too. I found her in a state of nervous prostration which quite alarmed me. But the fire, you know, and the death of an old servant, are sufficient to account for it. I will just glance into Sir Anthony's room, with your permission, my dear Mr. Philip, and if I find, as I anticipate, that he is sleeping peacefully, I promise you that I will not disturb him."

Philip led the way accordingly to Sir Anthony's room. Dr. Barclay had already seen Henry and prescribed for him, so he passed the lad with only a friendly nod as he went through the dressing-room. Philip opened the door, and the doctor glided in, with professional silence

of foot, and a professional smile upon his rubicund face. He halted about a yard from the door and looked at the bed. Philip, in the background, looked too.

The lamp and fire had gone out, and the air struck chill as a vault. A little light came through the window-blinds; the shutters had not been closed, nor the curtains drawn. There was no sound from the bed, no movement of the bedclothes. Everything was still as death. The doctor took a step further into the room and paused again. Then he went straight up to the bed.

"Shut the door," he said to Philip, more abruptly than was his wont. Then he himself fled to the window and drew up the blind. The morning light fell blankly on the rigid form, the ghastly yellow face with sunken jaw, the bloodless claw-like hands, upon which the doctor's eye had rested. Philip uttered a sharp exclamation of horror and dismay.

"Good heavens! he is not—not—dead!"

The doctor made no immediate answer. With a face blanched to a hue very unlike its usual healthy color, he was feeling for the pulses that were still, for the heart that had ceased to beat. "I fear that it is so," he said at last.

"Can we not try restoratives? Let me summon help-"

"Summon what help you will, but you can never call him back to life," said the doctor solemnly. He laid the stiff hand back upon the bed. "The body is quite cold," he said. "Sir Anthony has been dead for hours."

"Do you think that it was his heart, then? What a terrible shock for Lady Kesterton," said Philip. "My poor cousin!"

He drew near and waited for the doctor's reply, look-

ing down meanwhile on the cold, dead face of the man whom, as he knew, few would mourn so sincerely as himself. "Poor Anthony!" he murmured.

The doctor took up the empty cup and smelt it, then tasted the dregs that remained. "Chloral, certainly," he said. "He has taken an overdose. I used to warn him that he would do it, if he were not very careful. A very small overdose would affect him. But he would not be warned. There will have to be an inquest, of course."

"And Lady Kesterton—"

"She must be told at once. Winyates, you are like a son of the house. You—"

"No, no, I could not tell her," said Philip, turning away with his hand to his eyes. "You must go to her yourself, doctor; you will be able to deal with her better than I. She has no love for me."

Dr. Barclay undertook the task. Some orders were given to the housekeeper and the valet, who were summoned at once; and then Philip went to inform the guests and the household of the tragic event which had occurred, and the doctor sought an entrance to Lady Kesterton's room.

What passed there, no one but the doctor himself ever exactly knew. He came out again in half an hour with a very odd expression upon his face—an expression of mingled amaze and perplexity. But to any inquiries he answered sedately that of course Lady Kesterton was very much upset—very much distressed; she had almost fainted when she heard the bad news, and was inclined to be hysterical. But he did not add that the widow of Sir Anthony had uttered some words so "wild and whirling," so utterly enigmatical and compromising,

that Dr. Barclay preferred, for the honor of the family, not to make them known.

She had spoken as if she were already aware of her husband's death—as if she had expected it; also as if it were a joy and a relief to her. In fact, for a minute or two she had completely lost possession of herself, and had displayed feelings which made poor Dr. Barclay's scanty white hairs stand erect upon his head. He was quite too conventional and respectable and stupid to imagine for one minute that she had had anything to do with Sir Anthony's death. Such a wild notion never crossed his mind for a moment. What, Lady Kesterton! a woman of unblemished reputation, who went to church on Sundays, dispensed alms to the poor, and gave the biggest dinner-parties in the neighborhood? Such a thing was inconceivable to Dr. Barclay's well-regulated mind. No, Sir Anthony had taken an overdose, and if he had previously had some little dispute with his wife which led her to cry out hysterically that she was glad of his death, why, it was not within Dr. Barclay's province to put foolish ideas into people's heads, and make them think that Lady Kesterton was a murderess. Dr. Barclay knew plenty of hysterical women; but he did not know any murderesses.

The news ran like wildfire through the house. Sir Anthony dead! Dead on the morning after the ball, after that half statement which he would never finish making now. Even in the first shock of the announcement there were murmurs of regret on this score. "What a pity that he should have died just now! What a pity that he should not have said all that he meant to say last night!"

"But, of course, he has left instructions. No doubt

his lawyer knows all about everything," said the guests to each other. "How terrible it would be if he were dead without revealing the secret to any one; and even Miss Paston never knew what he was going to say!" But this suggestion, which came from a comparative stranger in the house, was received with utter scorn.

Henry was, of course, almost the first person to whom Philip gently broke the news. He was hardly prepared for the storm of grief with which it was received. The boy seemed quite stunned at first. Nothing had ever roused him to such intensity of sorrow.

"My dear boy—my dear Harry—don't grieve so!" said Philip, startled by the passionate burst of sobs which succeeded to the lad's first despair. "Why should you? Sir Anthony was kind indeed to you, but the loss is not so great—"

"It could not be greater," said the boy, the tears falling fast over his pale cheeks. "Oh, I can't tell you yet, Phil—I'll tell you by and by. Lady Kesterton knows. I suppose you'll hear—don't ask me."

And Philip retired, disturbed but wondering; for he had never suspected that there was any depth of affection for Sir Anthony in Henry's heart. But in this he did Henry wrong. The lad had worshipped his unknown father for years, in the blind and reverential way that children will sometimes worship a cold and careless parent. Every little favor of kindness from Sir Anthony had been like sunshine to him, and yet he had kept his affections pretty resolutely to himself, fearing lest it might be unacceptable to its object and ridiculous to those who did not understand it. Throughout that long morning, when Sir Anthony in the next room was quietly sleeping his life away, it had been like a dream of ecstasy

to Henry that he might now claim the man whom he had loved so long as his own father—might let the world know how tenderly he regarded him, might lavish upon him the affection that hitherto had found so little outlet except in the presence of his sister. The dream was rudely dispelled, and Henry saw himself once more fatherless and alone. But he could not tell Philip yet. Of course, before the day was out, every one would know the truth.

He was removed in his bed to the sitting-room which adjoined Philip's bedroom. Here he lay and sorrowed quietly enough after that first outburst of grief, and here he gently said good-by to Betty, who came to tell him that she was going home with her brother.

"Beatrice is going to stay with Lady Kesterton," she said. "So perhaps I shall see you again—soon."

"I hope so," said Henry. He looked at her wistfully, almost wishing that he had courage to tell her the truth. But he did not like just then to speak of himself.

After Lady Betty came Elfrida, pale and weary-looking, having wept herself almost ill for poor Terry's death, and attributing Henry's look of depression to the same source.

"Don't grieve, Hal dear," she said; "I'll try to be to you as much as dear old Terry was. We shall never have a friend like her, but at least we can be friends to one another."

"There is another friend gone too, Elfie."

"Sir Anthony! Sir Anthony! How can you compare him to Terry as a friend?"

"More than a friend, my dear. Oh, Elfie, I must tell you all. What do you think he was going to say yesterday night? He was going to tell everybody if the fire

had not broken out and prevented him. But he told me."

"Did he, Harry?" The girl lifted her head eagerly. A new light came into her eyes. It had occurred to her as it had occurred to other people, that perhaps, now, she might "never know."

"We were his children, Elfrida—that was the secret of it all."

"His children!"

Elfrida gasped with indignation and wonderment. "His children, Harry? And our mother—our mother—"

"She was his wife."

"He told you so?"

"He told me so. And he meant everybody to know to-day, Elfie. Do not look like that. He had learned to love us—before he died."

The girl broke into a wild, scornful laugh. "To love us—a fine way of loving us—after twenty years of neglect! Love us? and let us think that we were being brought up on charity, that we were poor and friendless and worthy to be despised! Oh, Harry, don't talk to me about his love!"

"Elfie, you are hard—unjust."

"Then what was he to us? I always felt that he had injured us. I always believed that there was some wrong that he ought to have repaired. Henry, have you no feeling for your own mother? Think what she must have endured—and yet she loved him and forgave him to the end!"

"And we also, Elfie, must love and forgive him—to the end."

"It was his fault," cried Elfie bitterly, "that you lie here on this couch, Henry, instead of taking your place in the world of men. You have suffered pain and neglect for years; and I have suffered pain and humiliation, such as I could never tell you of. Do you think it was no hardship to me to go about this house like an inferior and a dependent? Why, if any one spoke a kind word to me, Lady Kesterton raged with anger, and he stood by and saw it all, and never helped me nor protected me in the very least! Oh, Henry, don't ask me to love him—it's as much as I shall ever be able to do if I forgive him—and more for your sake than for my own!"

And then she fell into bitter weeping, and would not be comforted for a time. But after a while the full significance of what Henry had told her began to dawn upon her mind. She thought, with a full heart and quivering pulse, that now, at least, she would not be deemed the inferior of the man she loved. She would bring him an unstained name, and a fortune, as well as a true, pure love. And she felt an unspeakable relief and comfort in the thought.

It was easier after this to tell the story to Philip next morning. But Philip was more alarmed than pleased to hear it. He had a vague impression that the story would be difficult to prove, and that possibly Henry had made some mistake. Certainly Lady Kesterton, who, apparently, had heard the story, was not acting as though she took the view of it that Henry did. She had already allowed her little son to be called Sir Gerald, and she had not spoken of Henry at all in the one interview that she had already had with Philip.

Under these circumstances, Philip thought that it behooved him to seek her out again, and to hint to her, with care and circumlecution, the gist of the story that

he had heard from Henry. To his surprise, she received the communication with perfect calm.

"Poor boy!" she said. "He has held apart from the world so long that he does not understand social differences. Yes, poor Sir Anthony did confess the miserable story—to him as well as to me. Henry and Elfrida were indeed his children; but he mistakes the position that he will hold. You understand me, do you not, Philip? His children certainly, but not his legitimate children; and that makes all the difference, don't you know?"

All the difference, indeed!

CHAPTER XXXI.

TWO POINTS OF VIEW.

It was a bold stroke. Lady Kesterton played for herself and her children, and she played well. Philip looked first incredulous and then dismayed. "Is it possible?" he said, and then paused as if he did not know what else to say.

Lady Kesterton saw his hesitation with a thrill of triumph. She had hardly counted upon being so implicitly believed. But Phil, trying to be scrupulously just, was weighing in his mind the possibility that Henry had been too much excited and overworn by the events of the past day to be able to judge correctly of what Sir Anthony had said.

"At any rate," said Lady Kesterton, "if—if I should be mistaken—and I do not think it likely—the matter is sure to be cleared up shortly. The Pastons, as we have always called them—oh, yes, they are poor Sir Anthony's children, and I think we have behaved very well to them, considering that they have no legal claim—they are surely not going to maintain that Sir Anthony married their mother?"

"If that were so," said Philip slowly, "Henry would be—master here."

"In Gerald's place! As if that were likely!" cried Lady Kesterton passionately. Then, controlling herself, she went on more calmly, "There will, no doubt, be letters or memoranda of some sort among Sir Anthony's papers. If it were so—an absurd idea, I think—I suppose there would be certificates. You had better mention the matter to Mr. Watson when he comes."

"I don't think Sir Anthony trusted this young man much," said Philip, in rather a doubtful tone. "Even the father had lost his confidence during the last few years. He may have deposited his papers somewhere else."

"He kept most of his important papers in the bureau and desk in his library, I think. You had better speak to Mr. Watson at once."

She did not mention that she herself, in the small hours of the preceding night, had already ransacked the desk and bureau of which she spoke, and had found nothing. She knew in her own mind that it was extremely unlikely that papers would not be found somewhere or other; but in the mean time she was not going to forestall matters by an admission of what her husband had said. She could always pretend that she had not understood him to mean so much. Nobody could contradict her but Henry; and who, Lady Kesterton asked herself contemptuously, who would believe a half-witted cripple against her? He would scarcely dare, perhaps, even to uphold his own opinion in opposition to hers; which showed how little she understood of Henry's character.

The guests had left the Park by this time. Lady Beltane had stayed on—professedly out of love for her cousin Eva; in reality, because she did not want to lose sight of Elfrida, nor be in ignorance of what Philip was doing. She wondered what was the matter with Eva in these days. Surely she was not sorrowing for

Sir Anthony? She was very white, very cold, very distraite. Once when Beatrice gave her a word of veiled congratulation on her son's position, she burst out crying hysterically, and could not be quieted for some time. But Lady Beltane thought that she had got a clue to her cousin's agitation when at last she was informed of "the extraordinary, the impudent claim which that boy Henry Paston had put forward"—for so the matter was worded to her—and her indignation was quite equal to that professed by Lady Kesterton.

It was after Philip's interview with Lady Kesterton, after another with "young Watson," who had succeeded to his father's business, and after a prolonged and fruitless search for papers, that he sought out Elfrida. She had spent the greater part of these two days with Henry. Perhaps it was fortunate that Henry was so much exhausted by the past events that he was ordered complete quiet; otherwise he would have discovered that his position had changed for the worse and not for the better at Kesterton Park. At present, both brother and sister were content to believe that their affairs were safe in Philip's hands, and that it was more respectful to Sir Anthony's memory to make no change apparent until after the funeral. The brother and sister had thereupon sat quietly together, talking little. Elfrida read aloud to Henry from time to time, and occasionally Henry slept. Neither were elated by this gleam of future prosperity. Perhaps they were both a little afraid of it, after bearing the yoke of adversity for so many years of their youth.

Elfrida was glad to find that she was not expected to take charge of the children, though she put down her freedom to motives quite different from those that really actuated Lady Kesterton. Elfie thought it was because her position in the house was changed for the better.

Lady Kesterton kept her away because she regarded her as her children's enemy.

"Mr. Winyates would be glad to speak to you, miss," said the servant, entering the little sitting-room where Elfrida spent her time with Henry. "He is in the library, and he says if you would be so kind as to step that way—"

"Very well, James, I will go," said Elfrida. It was Sir-Anthony's man who had come for her; he had always been scrupulously respectful in manner, and she sometimes suspected that he had been more in her father's confidence than she knew. She left him with Henry, who was sleeping, and went softly down the stairs into the library.

She had no conception of what Philip wanted, but she supposed that it had some reference to business matters, and she was not at all surprised to see that he looked exceedingly grave and pale.

"Thank you for coming," he said, giving her his hand and leading her to a chair with even a shade more than usual of the courtesy than she was accustomed to from him. "I wanted to speak to you very particularly this morning."

"Yes?" she said, gently. "I thought that very likely there was something about Henry—"

"Yes, it is about Henry. Elfie, I think you know me well enough to be sure that I would not say or do anything to hurt you if I could help it?"

She paled a little, and looked him full in the face. "There is something wrong, then?" she asked. "Something about—the relationship?"

"Just so, dear. We have searched everywhere—Watson and I—for papers, and we can't find a clue. We cannot find a single trace of a record of—of Sir Anthony's first marriage. Watson knows nothing of it. There is, of course, no entry of it in the church register of this parish. There does not seem to be a single proof that we can get."

"But Sir Anthony told Henry?"

"Yes, dear, but—Lady Kesterton declares that he was mistaken."

"Oh, Philip, that is impossible! Henry has told me so much that was said. You don't mean to say"—with gathering anger—"that you don't believe Henry's word?"

"No, Elfie, I don't say that in the very least. I only mean that in the hurry and confusion of the moment Henry might have mistaken Sir Anthony's meaning a little. That you and Henry were his children, nobody will deny; Lady Kesterton acknowledges that frankly; but what she says is that Sir Anthony never mentioned a marriage!"

Elfrida's face turned crimson, and then very white.

"Henry did not understand it in that way. Sir Anthony spoke to him—oh, had you not better talk to Henry about it, Philip? I don't feel as if "—her eyes filled with tears—"as if it were a subject that I could discuss."

"My dear Elfie," said Philip, more gently than ever—for was he not full of tenderness at having to destroy what he was beginning to think a mere castle in the air, built out of Henry's over-heated imaginings?—"I would spare you if I could—you know that. But you

are older than Henry; you have influence with him; and I want you to speak seriously to him—"

"To tell him that he has lied? Or that he has been a fool?" Elfrida could speak very strongly and much to the point when she chose.

"No," said Philip, seeing that it was no use in beating about the bush; "but to make him understand that his report of what Sir Anthony said is of no use, legally, unless other proof is found. My dear, we can't expect people to give up a fortune and a title simply on the report of a conversation, and a report which the third person present at it does not corroborate. You are quite reasonable enough to acknowledge that, Elfie."

Elfrida reflected for a minute or two, with a little pucker in her brows.

"I suppose you are right. I beg your pardon if I spoke hastily. But surely there will be plenty of proofs? Sir Anthony must have kept the certificate—"

"I am extremely sorry to say, Elfie, that at present there is absolutely nothing to be found. Mr. Watson knows nothing: there seems to be not a scrap of evidence. We have been doing all we could during the past four-and-twenty hours to obtain information, and we have obtained none."

"But there are plenty of things that you have not done yet!" exclaimed Elfrida, rapidly. "We could advertise for the record of the marriage—or for the clergyman—and we might ask my mother's family if they knew anything about it. They have gone back to Norfolk, I believe; but they might be asked if they knew—"

"We shall do everything of that kind that there is to

be done," said Philip gravely. "You trust to our honor and good faith, do you not?"

"Oh, to yours, to yours—yes. But you are not a Kesterton," said Elfrida.

"Remember that, if this story of Sir Anthony's is true, you are a Kesterton yourself," he said kindly. "You must not speak against your own race."

She looked up, softened by the words and by the tone. "What is to be done, then, Philip?" she asked.

"It is a difficult thing to say what I mean, dear. The fact is—I suppose you know that the inquest takes place this afternoon?"

"Oh, I had forgotten!"

"And that as Henry and Lady Kesterton were the last persons who saw Sir Anthony alive, their depositions will have to be taken."

"But how can Henry go to the inquest?" said Elfrida, opening her eyes wide.

"He need not go; the coroner and the jury will go to him. The inquest will be held in the large hall, and they will be taken up to his room when the time comes. It will be a merely formal interview—unless he makes it otherwise."

"What do you mean, Philip?" .

"I mean, dear Elfie, that unless it is absolutely necessary for Henry to speak, we hope that he will not mention the subject of conversation between him and Sir Anthony, nor the quarrel that seems to have taken place. Of course, he must answer any questions that are put to him, but he—need not volunteer information that might create a scandal."

Philip spoke carefully. Lady Kesterton and Mr. Watson had both urged this view of the case upon him,

and, conscious of the rectitude of his wishes and intentions, it had seemed to him a very reasonable one. But Elfrida's sensitive color flashed into her face at once.

"That seems to me a little like an attempt to suppress the truth," she said.

"You are unjust, Elfrida. You know that nothing on earth would induce us to suppress it."

"You, perhaps—not Lady Kesterton."

"I think you have scarcely any right to say so."

"Don't I know her well enough?" said Elfrida, with keen irony in her tones. "Have I not seen and studied her, and experienced her treatment of me, for nearly ten years? You know as well as I do, Philip," relinquishing the ironical tone for one of deep indignation, "that Lady Kesterton has always hated me and hated Henry. Do you suppose that she sees with any sort of pleasure the prospect of our being put over her children's heads? I am perfectly certain that if Lady Kesterton could kill us both with a word, she would not hesitate for one moment to do it. And if she could suppress this fact she would not hesitate to do it either. Surely you don't need me to tell you that Lady Kesterton is utterly unscrupulous?"

They were on the verge of a quarrel. Philip knew that Elfrida had read Eva Kesterton's character pretty correctly; but he was a man, and always therefore inclined to take a woman's side—even against another woman. He thought Elfrida harsh in her judgment, and only by a great effort restrained himself from saying so.

"Lady Kesterton is in a difficult position," he said at last; "but I do not think that she is likely to wish for any suppression of the truth. She only suggests that it will be unpleasant and harmful to us all if family affairs are discussed at the inquest. Don't you think so yourself?"

Put in this light, Elfrida was obliged to confess that what he said was true. And having relieved her mind by expressing her opinion of Lady Kesterton, she became more amenable to Philip's persuasion, and went back to Henry's room, having promised that she would represent matters to him as she was requested to do.

But she found more difficulties than she had anticipated. The first stumbling-block was Henry's apparent incapacity to understand what was wanted of him.

"Of course," he said, "I shall only answer their questions; but if they ask why he talked to me for so long a time, and whether there was any quarrel, or anything of that sort, what can I say but the truth?"

"Yes, dear, I know. But I suppose Lady Kesterton

does not want the truth to leak out in that way."

"I don't understand. Does not all the world know the truth by this time?"

"I don't think any one does, Harry, dear."

The lad's face flushed.

"I don't care for myself, but I don't want any slur to rest on you, Elfie. People have gossipped about us long enough. Everything ought to be made clear and plain at once."

"But, Harry, Philip says it is no good saying anything until we get proofs. The word of one person alone—your word even—it seems is not enough."

"There is Lady Kesterton's word as well as mine.

She knows."

Elfrida was silent for a moment.

"Hal, dear," she said at last, "do you think it possi-

ble that you misunderstood Sir Anthony a little bit? For it is very evident that you and Lady Kesterton have not taken what he said in the same way."

Henry's face flushed with surprise.

"How could she take it any other way?" he asked seriously.

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know. But she says it was—different."

"You must tell me exactly what she does say, Elfie."

"Oh, I can't, Hal! I haven't seen her, and I don't quite know. But she seems to think that Sir Anthony meant"—her voice dropped low—"that we were his children, but that mother—mother was not his wife."

"Does Lady Kesterton say that?"

The shocked look, the startled eye and quivering lip, made Elfrida put her hand caressingly to his face. "Dear Harry!" she said. "Perhaps you did misunderstand."

"Oh, no," said her brother quietly, but with a curious new-born dignity, "no, I did not misunderstand. And I do not think that Lady Kesterton misunderstood. Elfie, I ought to see Lady Kesterton about this."

"Hal, don't, dear! She will only insult us."

"I don't think she can insult me to my face," said Henry calmly, "although she may try to deceive others behind my back. Elfrida, do you think I do not know what my father said to me?"

"Oh, Henry," said his sister, with a little gasping cry, "if you could only prove it! If he had only told you where the marriage took place, or something of that kind!"

But Henry shook his head. "If Lady Kesterton would come to me," he said. "I think I should under-

stand things better. Elfie, get me my writing things. I will send her a note."

Elfie did his bidding obediently. Now that he was without his invalid couch and other articles of comfort that had been destroyed by the fire, he was much more helpless than he used to be; but with Elfrida's help he at last succeeded in writing a note, which he worded as follows:

Dear Lady Kesterton: I have not quite understood what your wishes are respecting the manner in which I should give my evidence, if it is required, this afternoon. As you and I alone know what passed between us and Sir Anthony shortly after the fire, might I ask you as a great favor to speak with me for a few minutes? I am not able to come to you or I would not trouble you to come here.—Yours very truly,

HENRY KESTERTON.

It was the first time that he had signed his name,

Elfrida, with many misgivings, confided the missive to the hands of Lady Kesterton's maid; and in about a quarter of an hour received the following reply for her brother:

Lady Kesterton absolutely declines to hold any communication with Henry Paston, unless he withdraws the extraordinary statement respecting his birth and pretensions which he has made to Mr. Winyates—a statement which, at present, she has not the slightest reason to believe.

Henry read the note twice with a look of mingled scorn, incredulity, and pity, which puzzled his sister. But he did not speak for some minutes. He put the paper down on the bed beside him, closed his eyes, and sighed.

"What shall you do, Harry?" asked his sister.

He opened his eyes and let them rest on her with a rather mournful smile. "I shall stand up for my rights and yours," he said; "but I shall not, I hope, fight in an unfair way. I can promise no more, Elfie."

And she did not press him for more. But she was struck by the manliness and decision of his tone. It seemed as though the approaching contest had made him at once her elder and her superior. She had nothing to do but to wait and to obey.

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CHAPTER XXXII,

THE GAUNTLET IS THROWN DOWN.

The inquest was likely to be, as Philip had said, a merely formal matter. Everybody knew perfectly well beforehand what the verdict would be—"Accidental death from an overdose of chloral." That was what the doctor had already said, and what the jury also was sure to say. The twelve good men and true gathered at three o'clock in the great hall of Kesterton Park, and with them came the coroner, a Mr. Thorne, who was a well-known M.F.H., and a rather popular man in the county, but not a little of a gossip, and always glad of an opportunity for asking awkward questions. He was extremely useful sometimes, but at others he was voted a nuisance even by his best friends.

Matters proceeded in the usual course. James, Sir Anthony's man, was interrogated. Then Lady Kesterton appeared, and she was allowed to tell her story in her own way. She narrated how she had looked into her husband's dressing room in order to persuade him to go to bed (that was the way she put it), how she found him talking to the invalid boy, Henry Paston, and after remaining for a few minutes had gone back to her own room. "Was that the last time you saw Sir Anthony?" she was asked.

"It was the last time I spoke to him. I crept back in about half an hour's time to see whether he was in bed. I then saw him through the door. He nodded to

me, as much as to say that he would come directly, and I went back to my own room again."

Lady Kesterton was complimented on her wifely devotion and dismissed. But she remained in the hall to hear the rest of the proceedings.

"Mr. Henry Paston" being then named, the gentlemen were desired to walk up to his room, as he was not able to leave his bed. Two or three members of the family and household, as the newspaper reporter phrased it, followed them to Mr. Paston's room, namely, Lady Kesterton, Philip Winyates and Lady Beltane. Elfrida was already with her brother.

None of the gentlemen of the jury, nor the coroner, had ever seen Henry before, though all of them had heard of him. More than one started at the sight of the ethereal-looking face, his golden hair, and grave, earnest, young blue eyes. There was a slight flush on his thin cheeks, but this increased his beauty; and a general feeling of sympathy was experienced for the boy, whose sad story was partly known or guessed at by everybody present.

"Your name is Henry Paston, I think?" It was the usual opening, but Elfrida's eyes dilated with terror when she heard it, and Lady Kesterton turned deathly pale. Henry answered quietly—

"That is the name by which I am generally called."

"Do you mean to imply that it is not your real name?" said Mr. Thorne.

"I do. But I do not suppose we need go into that at present."

"You will oblige me with your real name, young sir," said Mr. Thorne, stiffly, being much nettled by the touch of hauteur in Henry's tone and bearing.

"My name, since you wish for it, is Henry Kesterton, and I am Sir Anthony Kesterton's eldest son," said Henry, clearly and steadily.

Lady Kesterton made a movement as if to speak, but Philip whispered something to her which restrained her. There was a "sensation" in the room, and Mr. Thorne looked as though he were about to have an apoplectic fit. But before he could speak, Philip intervened.

"Lady Kesterton desires me to say, sir, that the matter of this young gentleman's name concerns the family only, and has nothing to do with the matter of her husband's death."

"Indeed, but I think it has," said Mr. Thorne, pompously. "It was perhaps a matter of discussion at the moment, and if the discussion were accompanied by agitation of mind, it may have been the ultimate cause of Sir Anthony's unfortunate decease. Was your—er—relationship to Sir Anthony the topic of conversation, may I ask?"

"It was."

"Perhaps you had better relate what passed."

"I could hardly repeat the whole conversation. He told me for the first time of the relationship, but without any sign of agitation. Then Lady Kesterton came in, and remained for a short time with us. My father," Henry said the words with a proud assurance which startled his hearers, "my father kindly attended to my wants, as I was feeling very weak and faint, and when he saw that I was sleepy, but not before—he went to his own room. I never saw him again."

Mr. Thorne ought to have been satisfied with this statement, but curiosity got the better of him again, and he asked:

"Was Lady Kesterton present when Sir Anthony spoke of this relationship?"

Henry glanced for a moment at her ladyship, whose impassive face revealed no trace of feeling, and then answered quietly:

"She was."

And there Henry's examination ended.

"I should like to make one additional remark," said Lady Kesterton. Her face was ashen white, and this pallor, so marked in contrast to her mourning gown, procured her a hearing at once.

"I desired to avoid all reference to family matters. Since they have been introduced, however, I have no resource open, for my own son's sake, but to mention a fact that the last speaker has ignored. He is Sir Anthony Kesterton's eldest son, without a doubt; but, as far as I know, he has no right to the name of Kesterton." And with this significant sentence Lady Kesterton bowed slightly and left the room.

The stupefaction into which the twelve honest gentlemen of Southshire had been thrown by this little scene was not dissipated when Henry, with scarlet face and sparkling eyes, cried out:

"I have told you the truth, and she knows it. My father told her so."

Then the color vanished from his face, and his head fell back among the pillows. He had fainted away, and before he recovered from his swoon the jury flitted from the room, and the inquest was over. He did not hear until later that Lady Kesterton had also fainted when she gained her own apartments, and that in her case the fainting-fit had been followed by hysterics.

"Do you think you were quite wise, Henry?" Philip asked him afterward, with affectionate regret.

Henry answered with a wistful smile. "If I am Sir Anthony's eldest lawful son, and his heir," he said, "there is no use in concealing the fact."

"No, dear lad-if-"

"You don't believe me. But some day you will see that I speak truth."

"I do believe that you speak the truth, as far as you know it," said Philip, sore perplexed between his love for Henry and his perception of possibilities; "but I cannot help thinking that there may have been some error, and that it would have been better to be silent until you were a little more sure."

"If you had heard Sir Anthony speak, you would have been quite sure," said Henry. Then his eyes filling with tears: "It is for Elfrida's sake. If I am under the ban, she shares my disgrace. I want to settle the matter, so that she may have no burden of doubt to bear. It would be worse for her than for me."

"I don't know that," said Philip gravely. "She may have the protection of a husband's name by and by."

"Yes, but it is a story that people don't forget. And she may live for years and years, and her children will come after her. As for me, I shall die and be forgotten. Gerald will have the title before long in any case."

"Nonsense! you may live to be a hundred. But what is to be done next?"

Henry looked at him speechlessly. "My dear boy," Philip went on, "you have thrown down the gauntlet. It will be war to the knife now between Lady Kesterton and you. She will fight to the last for the rights of

her little son and daughter, and possession is nine parts of the law. She is only waiting until the funeral is over and Sir Anthony's will has been read to turn you out."

"Oh, let us go at once!" cried Elfrida suddenly. "Why should we stay where we are not wanted?"

"We must stay," said Henry resolutely, "until the will has been read. That may very likely clear up the whole matter."

"And if it does not?"

But Henry shook his head and would not entertain that view of the position.

And so the days before the funeral dragged by. Lady Kesterton remained in her own apartments. Elfrida was almost afraid to move from Harry's side. She received a letter from Betty, but Betty wrote in utter ignorance of what was beginning to be known as "The Kesterton Scandal," and, therefore, it contained little that was really comforting to Elfrida. And Lord Beaulieu did not write. He had sent her a note on the day of Sir Anthony's death; but it was plain that as soon as the gossip reached his ears his mouth was sealed. And the story was ringing through the country. "The extraordinary claim," as some people called it, of Henry Paston to Sir Anthony's title, was as unexpected, even by friends of the family, as it was novel. Everybody was asking whether it would go into the law courts, and every one was curious to know whether "the Pastons" had "anything of a case." It was the general opinion that they had not, and that the boy suffered from hallucinations, for which "some people" would have shut him up in a mad-house.

The brother and sister lived in a state of feverish an-

kinds, but as yet nothing had come of them. When the day of the funeral arrived they were no nearer the truth than they had been on the day of Sir Anthony's death. The funeral was an imposing one. Lady Kesterton had bidden all the world to her husband's obsequies. And then a very unexpected piece of news was communicated to the family and to the world at large. Sir Anthony had left no will at all. So that his secret was not to be divulged in this way. One or two persons noticed that Lady Kesterton's eyes glittered brightly when this fact was made known, as if it were a matter of rejoicing; but that, they concluded, could not possibly be the case, for the widow lost, probably by the absence of a will.

It was on the following morning that Lady Kesterton, sitting alone in the library, summoned Philip Winyates to her side. He had been expecting some such summons, and was prepared for it.

"Sit down," she said to him abruptly. "I will not detain you long."

"I am quite at your service, Lady Kesterton," he said, and then he seated himself in a chair opposite her own and waited for her to speak.

How white and wasted she looked! how much aged by the incidents of the last few days! There was no trace of weeping on her face, but there was an indefinable expression of suffering which produced a painful impression on the observer.

"You heard," she said at last, "that there was no will." Philip bowed. He could not trust himself to speak.

"There is no proof existing, apparently, of the statement made by that boy upstairs."

"Excuse me, Lady Kesterton—are you quite certain that you understood Sir Anthony aright?"

"Quite certain." There was a peculiar sharpness in her tone. "He has no other proof to produce, I suppose."

"At present—not."

"At present? Are you on their side, then? But I forgot—you have a penchant for Elfrida?"

"More than a penchant, Lady Kesterton; I have a real and true love for her."

"It comes to the same thing in the long run—you are on her side!"

"I could not say that, exactly. I want justice to be done."

"As if justice were not on the side of my children!" cried Lady Kesterton, with a sudden flash of passionate feeling. "Why should these Pastons come now to take away their inheritance? Is it likely that if they had been Sir Anthony's legitimate children he would have allowed them to remain in the background for so long? It is a plot, got up to rob Janey and Gerald. Sir Anthony always hated them, and he would have been glad to see any one in their places—even the children of—of—a dairy-maid."

"You think, then," said Philip, all his acuteness on the alert, "that Sir Anthony himself devised a plot? Did you hear him say anything that tended that way?"

"No, not in the least," said Lady Kesterton, suddenly stiffening and growing cold. "I speak only of what I think likely. He never loved my children; just as," in a lower voice, "he never loved me."

Philip was silent; he respected her emotion, but at the same time he was more than ever conscious of his old dislike of Lady Kesterton, his old distrust of her. Presently she roused herself, gave a curious little shudder, a curious little glance round the room, as if seeking for some one who was not there, and said:

"Don't let us talk of him. I can't—bear it—yet. I want to speak to you about the claim set up by Henry

Paston. Why does he not give it up?"

"He is convinced of its truth."

"And he is going to try to establish it?"

"I believe so. Yes."

"And you are upholding him. You are, as I said, on his side. Well, then, you will see readily enough that this house is not wide enough for me and for—my children's enemies. Unless he gives up his claim he must go out of it."

Philip regarded her steadily. "Although he is your late husband's son?" he said.

"That has nothing to do with me. The law does not recognize him—I go by the law. He is trying to oust my children from their rightful position. Let him go elsewhere to do it."

"But, Lady Kesterton, let me point out to you that he has nowhere to go."

"Exactly. Then why does he defy me and put himself in opposition to me? If he will give up any notion of that sort he may stay on, and his sister too; she can go on teaching the children, and I will give him houseroom—at any rate for a time. I am quite willing to overlook the past if he comes to his senses."

"I am to tell him this from you?"

[&]quot;Yes."

[&]quot;I do not think that he will accept your terms."

[&]quot;Then he can go out of the house—to the work-house,

if there is nowhere else to go. I think myself that a lunatic asylum would be the best place. I am sure he must be suffering from hallucinations. How else could he imagine the things that he says he remembers?—unless it is pure wickedness and malice."

"You cannot look at Henry and suspect wickedness or malice."

"Then it is madness, and the sooner he goes to a mad-house the better. You can tell him all that I say if you like."

Philip bowed coldly and rose.

"Of course," he said, just as he reached the door, "Harry will never want a home so long as I am alive; but I wish the matter could have been arranged without your seeming to turn him out of doors as soon as his father is dead."

Lady Kesterton's eyes glittered coldly.

"It will be his own fault if he goes," she said.

Philip departed on his mission to Henry and Elfrida, In a quarter of an hour he was back again with a

In a quarter of an hour he was back again with a message. He found her sitting in exactly the same position as that in which he had left her, with rigid pale face and cold eyes staring immovably at the glowing embers of the fire. She looked so stern, so forbidding, that Philip almost hesitated to disturb her.

"I have come, Lady Kesterton, to tell you Henry's answer."

She bowed her head, but did not look up.

"He wishes very earnestly that you would see him."

"I will not see him."

"Then, if you really will not, he wishes me to say that he cannot accept your proposition either for him-

self or his sister, and that he is quite willing to leave the house at any moment."

"He means to fight the matter out, then?"

"He does."

"Very well, I shall put it into my lawyer's hands," said Lady Kesterton, dryly. "And I beg that he will leave the house as soon as he can conveniently do so."

"With regard to that," said Philip, "I have a word to say. I shall take the management of Henry's affairs on my own shoulders and provide a home for him. But to do this I must have at least one day's time. You must allow him to remain in the house until the day after to-morrow: he cannot be removed earlier. On that day he will go with me to London."

"I consent to the day's delay," said Lady Kesterton, but I beg that it may not be prolonged beyond that time."

Philip turned to depart, but before he could gain the door a knock was heard, and a servant entered, bearing a card on a silver tray, which he presented to his mistress.

"Lord Beaulieu for Miss Paston," he said.

Philip started: Lady Kesterton frowned and bit her lip.

"Show Lord Beaulieu into this room," she said, after a moment's pause. "I want to speak to him."

"Shall I tell Elfrida to come here?" asked Philip.

"Thank you, no," said Lady Kesterton, dryly. "I can summon Miss Paston myself when I want her. May I beg you to leave me, Mr. Winyates?"

And Philip had, of course, no choice but to obey.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

LORD BEAULIEU did not know that he was about to enter Lady Kesterton's presence. He started at the sight of her, sitting in her crape dress and widow's cap at the fireside, and he would almost have turned back had she not spoken his name.

"Lord Beaulieu—come in, please; I want to speak to you."

The young man entered in some confusion. He bowed low over her extended hand, and murmured a few words of sympathy, and of excuse for his appearance.

"I had a message for Miss Paston," he said, "and I thought I might perhaps find her at home without troubling you, Lady Kesterton."

This was rather an awkward speech, but Lady Kesterton's answer somewhat relieved Beaulieu's mind.

"I am glad you came. I had strong reason for wishing to see you. I was thinking of writing you a note. My recent affliction," said Lady Kesterton piously, "affords me no excuse for neglecting my duty. Pray sit down, Lord Beaulieu."

He sat down and looked at his hat. It was not very easy to open a conversation with Lady Kesterton. But she began it of her own accord.

"I dare say you have been hearing some gossip in the

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neighborhood respecting an incident which took place during the—the inquiry into the cause of my husband's death. I mean an interview with Henry Paston."

"Well, yes, I have heard something," said Lord Beau-

lieu.

"I wished to tell you myself the truth about it. You have heard, perhaps, that Henry Paston claims to be Sir Anthony Kesterton's eldest son?"

"Yes, I heard that."

"In a sense it is perfectly true. I am extremely sorry to have to go into the details of this story—the world need never have heard of it but for Henry Paston's indiscretion. I will not call it by a harsher word. Lord Beaulieu, Henry Paston is indeed Sir Anthony's son, but Sir Anthony was never married to his mother."

"And-Elfrida!" said Beaulieu, hastily.

"She is, of course, in the same unfortunate position." Lord Beaulieu knit his brows and leaned back in his chair. He looked as if he were considering a question profoundly.

"Sir Anthony informed the boy Henry of the truth shortly after the fire. The boy was put to sleep in Sir Anthony's dressing-room. I came in and heard part of the conversation. I heard Sir Anthony tell him what I now tell you—plainly and without disguise of any sort. What, then, was my horror and amaze, Lord Beaulieu, when I found, as soon as Sir Anthony was no more, that this boy was taking advantage of his death to gain a position for himself which certainly my husband never contemplated. He has had the audacity to declare that he is the eldest lawful son—the heir, you understand. He disputes the title with Gerald. I never heard anything so extraordinary in my life."

"But—I cannot understand," said Beaulieu. "I know Henry pretty well. He is not capable—" He stopped for a moment, in the effort to express himself without giving offence. "He would not make a statement that he did not think, at any rate, to be correct, I am sure."

"I know so little of the boy that I cannot give an opinion either way on that matter. But I believe most strongly that he is subject to hallucinations, and I think he has imagined half of what he says Sir Anthony told him. My dear Lord Beaulieu, I was present at the time," her face turned a shade paler as she spoke, "and I distinctly heard all that Sir Anthony had to say. The mother was a servant in the house—of course it was long before his marriage. Sir Anthony bitterly regretted it, and was wishful to do all in his power to repair the wrong to the children. But as to putting Henry in Gerald's place, why—it is legally impossible, and poor Sir Anthony never dreamed of any such thing."

"How has the mistake arisen, then?" said Lord Beaulieu, his fair young face growing a little stern. The whole story shocked him more than he cared to say.

"I think that the poor boy did not understand," said Lady Kesterton, in a compassionate tone. "You see, he has always been out of the world, and he does not perhaps realize the differences that are so great to us."

"He always seemed wonderfully bright and clever to me."

"Yes, he has very good natural capacities. But you must remember what had just happened; he had been saved from a burning house by Philip's bravery—yours also, Lord Beaulieu—and he had been very much over-excited and overstrained. Why, the very fact of sleep-

room was enough to unhinge him. The doctor says so. And in that excited, nervous state, he hears this story from Sir Anthony, and of course he does not hear it aright. He builds up his own theory upon it, and Sir Anthony—who alone could put him right—is not here to clear up the mistake. It is most unfortunate, and it places me in a very unpleasant position, I assure you, for I am obliged to act decisively for my own dear children's sake."

"Then—then—there is no proof of what Henry states? No letters—no certificates?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"Nothing but his bare word."

"His bare word-against mine, Lord Beaulieu."

The young man bowed, muttered an indistinct "I beg your pardon," and relapsed again into meditative silence.

"May I trouble you with one more question?" he said at last. "What communication was Sir Anthony about to make to the world at large on the night of the ball? He was distinguishing Miss Paston in every possible way—showing her every attention in his power. What did it all mean? He could not have been going to say publicly that she was his—his—illegitimate daughter."

Lord Beaulieu lowered his voice as he spoke the words. He came of an old race, and his ancestry was stainless. A shadow upon the birth of the woman that he loved was a matter of terrible significance to him.

Lady Kesterton had already foreseen that this question would be asked; it was a weak place in the armor. But she had provided herself with an answer.

"It was an ill-judged proceeding," she said, lowering her eyelids. "He did not mean to acknowledge her, but he meant to make her a sort of heiress. He told me what he meant to do, and what he was going to say. It was her twenty-first birthday, and on that day she entered into possession of a sum of ten thousand pounds which an old friend (of course he meant himself) had left to her. He meant her to give up teaching and lead an easier and more enjoyable life, poor girl; but his kindly plans were frustrated by his sudden death."

"Then is she left penniless?" said Beaulieu, with a keen look. "Or will your ladyship be prepared to make the deficiency good? I gather that the deed or gift, or whatever it was, had not been executed?"

"It had not, but I grieve to say that I am quite unable to carry out Sir Anthony's intentions. I cannot take my children's money. I am, of course, but a trustee for them. If they were of age it would be a different thing."

Lord Beaulieu was looking very pale, and there was an expression of deep concern upon his face. He rose hastily, and stood by the mantel-piece, grasping it with one hand as he spoke.

"You are perfectly certain, Lady Kesterton, that Henry is mistaken—that there was no marriage between Sir Anthony and Henry's mother?"

"Oh, perfectly certain," said Lady Kesterton.

"I am afraid," said the young man, growing perceptibly whiter, but looking very determined, "that you must be correct. Forgive me for putting it in that way. Of course you do not know—though you may have guessed what my feelings for Elfrida have been. But this this—"

"It would be impossible, of course," said Lady Kester-

ton with decision, "to marry her to the head of one of the oldest families in England."

Lord Beaulieu pulled his mustache. That was exactly his own feeling. He did not want to behave badly to Elfrida. He was very much in love with her, and the thought of giving her up was a grief to him. But family pride was strong, and disgrace had never touched him yet. He could not be the first to bring the bar-sinister into his children's pedigree.

"If there were any way," he said, nervously, "in which I could make good to her the loss she has incurred through Sir Anthony's sudden death. She need never know. If you would only take it upon you, Lady Kesterton, to tell her just what Sir Anthony was going to say—that an old friend had left her some money? I could easily spare the sum you named—ten thousand would not be much to me if I could save her from poverty."

Lady Kesterton listened in dismay. Was her own fiction to be the means of bringing comparative wealth to Elfrida and Henry? Wealth, too, that would perhaps be used against herself and her children? Her whole soul rose in arms to prevent such a consummation.

"I did not say that they would be left in poverty, Lord Beaulieu," she said in a dignified tone. "Naturally, the family would not permit that. The Pastons have always been treated most liberally, and they will be provided for as usual. I could not think of allowing any such generosity on your part."

Lord Beaulieu looked melancholy.

"I should have liked to do something," he said, "something that would make her life pleasanter for her. Anything—except—"

He stopped short; he knew that he was about to deprive her of the one and only thing that could smooth her way in life for her. If he married her, Elfrida would be very securely protected from all evil chance. But to marry her now would have required a certain amount of heroism; and Lionel, Lord Beaulieu, was not of the type which is capable of that sort of heroism. Physically, he was brave enough; he would have walked up to a cannon's mouth, taken a live shell in his hands, or scaled the wall of an enemy's fortress, with all the coolness in the world; but he was not morally brave—he could not fly in society's face and outrage its prejudices and the traditions of his house by taking for his wife a woman upon whose birth lay an indelible stain. It was the one thing that—even for Elfrida—he would not do.

"She will be in no need, I assure you," said Lady Kesterton quickly; "her future is assured. Philip Winyates, you know—" and there she paused significantly.

"Winyates! Why, what has he to do with it?" asked

Beaulieu, sharply.

"Well, it is no secret that he has been for some time devotedly attached to her. I fancy that even this unhappy discovery will make no difference. You see he has no title; he comes of no really great family. Although he is allied to the Kestertons, his father was a nobody. It is not so unsuitable for him as it would be to you."

"And Elfrida! She does not care for him," said the young man, blushing hotly. He did not intend to marry Elfrida himself, but he did not like to hear of her being

likely to marry anybody else.

"Elfrida does not dislike him," said Lady Kesterton discreetly. "He told me that he had no fear of over-

coming her scruples in course of time. You see he can make a home for Henry as well as for her, and that is an attraction."

"But did she not—did she not—think of me?" cried Beaulieu, choking with the anger and mortification which, in spite of his pride, he was still capable of feeling.

"My dear Lord Beaulieu," said Lady Kesterton smoothly, "of course she knew—she understood that you could not marry her under present circumstances."

"She understood it, did she?" Lord Beaulieu came a step or two forward, and endeavored to master his almost overwhelming agitation and displeasure. "Then I think there is nothing left for me to explain. I'll say good-morning, Lady Kesterton. I don't see any necessity for my seeing Elfrida, as she understands the position of things already. But she was always very clever—very—" He made a dead pause and seemed to swallow something in his throat. "There's not much need for me to stay here any longer. I'm very much obliged to you, Lady Kesterton, for opening my eyes. If you tell Miss Paston that I've been—and gone—I dare say she will understand."

"Good-by, Lord Beaulieu," said Lady Kesterton.
"I am so sorry that matters have not turned out more satisfactory. But you are too wise to regret for long what cannot be altered, and you may console yourself by the thought that you have done the best and wisest thing."

At present Lord Beaulieu did not find much consolation in this thought; however, he took his leave without contradicting Lady Kesterton's fine sentiments. And when he was gone, Lady Kesterton lay back in her chair and smiled,

"He was wonderfully easy to manage," she said to herself. "Much easier than I should have expected. He will go back to Betty now. Beatrice ought to be grateful to me. But I suppose it is useless to expect gratitude from her when she wants to keep Philip all to herself. Upon my word, I don't know whether Philip still wants to marry Elfrida or not. I hope he does, and then he will take her out of my sight. She is too like—too like—"

Even in her thoughts Lady Kesterton did not pronounce the name. She shuddered a little as the face of Anthony Kesterton, fierce, mocking, defiant, as she had seen it last, rose up before her mind's eye. There was certainly no likeness of expression between father and daughter, but there was an extraordinary resemblance of feature and coloring. No one to whom the clue had once been given, could ever fail to notice the similarity between the faces.

Lady Kesterton was not quite without feeling—not quite without remorse. The many times that she had been obliged to mention Sir Anthony in the past interview had tried her nerves; she sank back in her chair, sick and shuddering, when Lord Beaulieu had quitted the house. During the daytime she generally managed to banish all memories of him; it was only at night, as a rule, that his face, dead or alive, seemed to haunt her with an unspoken reproach. But to think of that terrible night—to quote his speeches or to put speeches into his mouth—had been a little too much even for her nerves of steel; and she wished for a moment or two with all her heart that Sir Anthony were alive again, even if it were only to taunt her and to rob little Gerald of his inheritance.

Meanwhile, Philip, sorely puzzled and troubled in mind, had gone to Elfrida, whom he found taking a noon-day walk up and down the picture-gallery, which had, almost miraculously, escaped injury from the fire in the west wing.

"Elfrida," he said, gently, "Lord Beaulieu is here." She paused in her walk and clasped her hands; the bright color leaped into her face.

"Did he ask for me?"

"I believe he did; but Lady Kesterton asked to speak to him first. He is with her in the library now."

The color faded from the girl's cheeks; her hands fell to her side.

"Then it is all over," she said, looking Philip straight in the face. "She will make him believe—what she likes."

"I think that Beaulieu has got a will of his own," said Philip. "But suppose you come down at once? I will go with you and brave my lady's wrath. Let her say what she has to say in my presence and yours."

"Thank you, Philip," she said, softly. "You are very good—very generous." She turned and gave him her trembling little hand to hold for a moment. "No, I won't go down. It would seem like distrusting Lionel, and I won't do that."

"You love him, Elfie?"

"Yes-with my whole heart."

"And you think-you think you can trust him?"

"Philip!"

"My dear, it is only this—that if he believes in Lady Kesterton at all, he will hear what may prove a sore trial to his faith in you, or to his strength of will."

"Then he had better hear it at once," said Elfrida,

drawing herself up to her full height. "He had better hear the very worst. Then I shall know how much his love is worth."

And she resumed her walk up and down the gallery, with hands clasped behind her and head bent down. Philip paced beside her, rather by way of giving her his company than because he had anything to say.

"If he comes up here—to me," said Elfrida at last in a trembling voice, "you will leave us for a little while,

will you not, Philip?"

"My dear," he said, softly, "I will." But in his heart he did not believe that Lord Beaulieu would ever come. He knew the power of Lady Kesterton's envenomed tongue.

For some time they walked up and down. Philip was wretched, knowing all that Elfrida must be enduring, but he did not speak. He was sure that she preferred silence—a silence in which she was listening—listening-straining every nerve to hear the footfall on the stairs, the hand upon the door, that did not come.

At last they heard one sound. It was the reverberation of the clang with which the great hall door always closed after a guest. Elfrida stopped short, and put her hand to her throat. "He has gone!" she whispered.

"No, no, I hope not. Elfrida, dearest, do not look like that. He cannot have gone without seeing you.

Let me go and inquire."

"No," she said, firmly; "you need not. I am perfectly sure of it. I feel that he has gone. But you may come with me if you like to Lady Kesterton and ask her what she has said that has driven him away."

It was with a proud step and erect head that she entered the library and stood before Lady Kesterton.

Philip entered also and closed the door behind him. Lady Kesterton evidently misunderstood the motive of Elfrida's action, for she smiled in her coldest and most malignant manner as she remarked: "You are too late, Miss Paston. Lord Beaulieu has gone."

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN BEAULIEU'S PLACE.

"I am aware that he is gone," said Elfrida. "What I came to ask you was why I was not told that he was here, when, I believe, he came especially to see me."

Lady Kesterton darted a swift look at Philip. She was not altogether displeased, however, that he had disobeyed her commands.

"Lord Beaulieu came in the first instance to see you," she said; "but after a little conversation with me he relinquished that intention, and other intentions as well."

"Lady Kesterton, surely you could let Beaulieu answer for himself," cried Philip, hotly.

"Never mind, Philip," said Elfrida. She was white to the lips now, and was standing with her hands pressed lightly on the back of a chair. This support was really necessary to her just then, for the room swam round, and she felt as if she were on the point of falling; but she was all the more anxious to hide her feeling of weakness from Lady Kesterton. "Never mind," she said, valiantly, "Lord Beaulieu will write to me, no doubt. I am only anxious to know on what pretext I was denied to him to-day."

"No pretext was necessary," said Lady Kesterton, icily. "Beaulieu knew you were in the house, but he did not wish to see you. He said that he thought it would be best for him to go away, and that you would understand."

- "He said that?"
- "Yes, he did."
- "Then you must please inform me what you told him first to make him say so."

The words were quiet enough, but there was a ring of scorn and passion in her voice which made them effective.

"I do not know that I need reply to a question asked so insolently," said Lady Kesterton, coldly; "but perhaps it will save trouble in the end if I do so. I told Lord Beaulieu the circumstances under which you and your brother are leaving my house, and of the extraordinary statement which your brother chooses to make respecting my husband's previous life; and Lord Beaulieu, being very properly shocked, declined to see you again."

"Declined to see me again!" Elfrida repeated, with a little gasp.

"Certainly. He gave me to understand that he had thought of asking you to be his wife. He very wisely abstained, I believe, from mentioning his project until after your twenty-first birthday, when you were to learn your history—"

"I asked him to wait! I asked him myself!" said the girl.

"Ah, well, it seems he did wait; and now that he knows who you are, he says that of course it is impossible for him to ask you to marry him."

"I think," said Philip, "that this message, if it is a message, might be given with a little more gentleness and delicacy, Lady Kesterton."

"I don't see that it matters how the message is given, so long as it is given at all," said Lady Kesterton, with

deliberate coldness. "I have no wish to give it other than correctly. You can ask Lord Beaulieu for yourself; he is at liberty to contradict any statement that I have made in his name."

"Elfrida, shall I go to him?" said Philip, turning eagerly to the girl, who with white lips and dilated eyes stood with her fingers still rigidly clasped upon the back of the chair. "Shall I ask him whether he said this thing? If he loved you, surely he would never send you a message of this kind!"

"No, Philip, you need not go," she answered, quietly, but the tone and the music seemed to have gone out of her voice. "If there is any mistake he is quite well able to explain it to me himself."

"Why should there be any mistake?" said Lady Kesterton. "What other line do you suppose that Lord Beaulieu could take? He is the head of one of the oldest families in the kingdom; he has a stainless record—he comes of a glorious race; would you have him take you to be his wife? It was enough of a mésalliance when you were a governess without a penny; but now—when you are worse than a nobody—what man of decent family would care to take you as his wife?"

"Lady Kesterton, this is too much," said Philip, commanding himself, though with great difficulty, so far as to speak calmly. "I beg to contradict every word that you have uttered. Elfrida is fit to be any man's wife; and if proof were needed that I think so, I will here repeat an offer that I made to her before the sad story to which you allude was made public. I ask her, in your presence, Lady Kesterton, to be my wife. I assure you that she shall have every happiness that love and care and respect can give; and that she shall never

regret the day when she gave her life into my keeping. Elfrida!"

He turned to her, and laid his hand gently on the rigid fingers that clasped the chair. She looked at him, but with blank, despairing eyes; almost as though she had not listened to what he said.

"Elfrida, my dearest! Listen to me. Won't you come to me? I love you and shall always love you, whatever happens. I will take you away from here, if you will come, and make a home for you—and for Henry too; then you will never be separated from him again. Will you not trust me with yourself, Elfie—and with him?"

He had touched the only chord that was likely to vibrate in Elfrida's breast at such a moment. Her fingers stirred beneath Philip's clasp; a look of conscious pain and yearning came into her large gray eyes. But still—though her lips moved and quivered—she did not speak.

"This may be a very pretty scene," said Lady Kesterton, with a chilling scorn, "and perhaps I ought to be gratified by the spectacle of your love-making, Philip; but I really think it exceedingly inappropriate."

"I think it could not be more appropriate," said Philip, turning to face her with a dignity of manner which somewhat surprised and overawed her. "I have stood by and heard you insult Elfrida in Lord Beaulieu's name; the occasion could not be more appropriate for me to declare my undying love and reverence for the woman I love."

"You had better make up your mind to accept Philip's offer, Miss Paston," said Lady Kesterton, abruptly. "I assure you it will be long before you find another man bold enough to take you and your brother on his hands."

The taunt was meant to wound, and it sent the hot blood flying to Philip's brow; but the whiteness of Elfrida's face remained unchanged. It gave her back, however, the power of speech, which for a time she seemed to have lost.

"You are quite right," she said, in broken tones so unlike her own that they wrung Philip's heart with passionate love and pity. "No man will be bold enough but Philip, and if he likes to take me—a poor thing that others have flung away—what am I, that I should refuse?"

"You are my queen and my sovereign lady," said Philip. "Accept me for any reason you like, my darling, and I will show you what true love means."

He put his arm round her and drew her close to him; she trembled like a reed but she did not resist.

"When this comedy is ended," said Lady Kesterton, "I should prefer to have the room to myself."

"You may be thankful, Lady Kesterton," said Philip, sternly, "that you have not the guilt of a tragedy at your door."

He turned to the door, leading Elfrida gently by the arm. She seemed perfectly submissive, and let herself be guided from the room with a docility which she was not usually so ready to exhibit. When they were gone, Lady Kesterton sank back in her chair with something not unlike a shudder. His words had touched her more keenly than he knew. "The guilt of a tragedy" lay already at her door.

She was looking white and unnerved when the luncheon bell rang, and Lady Beltane swept into the room to make a careless inquiry after her cousin's health. "You are coming in to luncheon, I suppose, Eva?"

"No, I think not," said Lady Kesterton faintly. "I don't feel equal to it to-day."

"You look awfully pale. I think you are giving way too much—and really—I did not know that you and Sir Anthony—"

"Don't speak of him; don't mention his name to me!" cried Eva with sudden, unwonted passion. "I can't bear any more—I have heard enough of him to-day—"

And then came a rush of tears, a burst of sobbing, which, as a matter of fact, took Lady Beltane somewhat by surprise. But after a moment's stare, she sat down by her cousin, patted her shoulder, and essayed something in the way of consolation.

"Don't cry, dear. You are thoroughly overdone. You ought to go away somewhere for a change, do you know. Let me send you in a glass of wine and a bit of bird—it will do you good? There's no use in starving oneself, even if one is in trouble." And certainly Lady Beltane looked as if she had experienced the truth of her own words.

"Yes, I am overdone," said Lady Kesterton, recovering herself a little, and lying back with closed eyes. "Don't let me keep you here, Beatrice. Go and get your lunch—I'll take something presently. Then come back; I have something to tell you."

"All right," said Lady Beltane, good-humoredly. She went away to the dining-room, thinking to herself, "What incomprehensible creatures we women are! I am quite sure that Eva detested Sir Anthony when he was alive, and she is crying her eyes out for him now. Just when she is left perfectly independent, too, and can have her own way for the first time in her life. I call it ridiculous."

She seated herself at the luncheon table, and then noticed that she was there alone.

"Where is Mr. Winyates?" she said to the butler who stood behind her chair.

"Mr. Winyates is lunching upstairs to-day, my lady."

"With the Pastons, I suppose," said Lady Beltane to herself; but she had too much regard for her own dignity to say a word aloud. She helped herself carefully from the dainty dishes that had been prepared, ordered a lunch for Lady Kesterton, and drank some very fine Madeira, indulging meanwhile in speculations respecting the present state of affairs at the Park.

"I wonder what has been going on this morning. Everybody has been invisible. I heard that Lord Beaulieu had called. Did he come to see Eva or Elfrida Paston, I wonder? I'll find it out from Eva after lunch. I hardly know whether to wish that he would stick to Elfrida or not. If he does, Philip will be left out in the cold, but poor little Betty will break her heart. Poor little Betty!—silly little fool! I really believe she thinks that Lionel is perfection—and he is only a handsome, conceited boy, without a grain of nobility in his composition. Well, here's for Eva and confidences; I'll make her give me this morning's history before I've done."

And after a little lingering over the cup of black coffee with which she liked to conclude her mid-day meal, Lady Beltane repaired once more to the library.

"So you have something to tell me," she said, after having made a few polite inquiries respecting her cousin, feelingly.

"Yes, something that will surprise you," Lady Kesterton answered, languidly. She was feeling stronger

now, and she took a little malicious pleasure in thinking of the news that she had to tell.

"I don't think anybody could surprise me now," said Beatrice, sinking into the depths of a big arm-chair, and holding out one pointed foot to the cheery blaze of the fire. In her heart she was reflecting that Eva had grown very plain, and that black was decidedly unbecoming.

"Lord Beaulieu was here this morning. He was asking for Elfrida Paston. Fortunately the card was brought to me; so I sent for him here at once, and told him about the recent development of affairs. Of course, he had heard some gossip, and I thought it right that he should receive a correct version of the story."

"That was rather clever of you," said Lady Beltane dispassionately. "Well, what did he say?"

"Oh, he took the rational view of things."

"Threw Elfrida Paston over, eh?"

"Well, Beaulieu was not very likely to wish to marry a girl of such antecedents."

"Ah, that is just like the men of the present day!" said Beatrice, throwing back her golden head with a look of disgust. "They swear eternal devotion, and then the least obstacle daunts them. I have not the slightest respect for Beaulieu's fiddle-faddle about 'family claims'! I knew exactly what he would say. Who thinks anything of a man's family nowadays? Beaulieu is perfectly antediluvian in his ideas."

"Philip Winyates will please you better, then," said her cousin dryly. "You will be glad to hear that his constancy was not disturbed by any considerations about Elfrida's birth." "What do you mean?" said Lady Beltane, flushing angrily.

"I mean that he brought her down here to ask why Beaulieu had gone away; and when he found that the young man had backed out of the entanglement he offered himself to Elfrida there and then; and she accepted him."

Beatrice listened with wide-open eyes, and turned a little paler; but recovering herself almost instantly, burst into a fit of scornful laughter.

"What an idyll! What a story for a three-volume novel! She accepted him, did she, as she could not get Lionel? I wonder Philip likes to be made a convenience of in that way!"

"You see he is very much in love with her," said Lady Kesterton, with a somewhat contemptuous smile.

"In love with her! I suppose he is. How long will it last? And what are they going to do? You do not propose that they should live here, I suppose?"

"They are going away to London. Philip takes charge of the party. I do not want either to see them or hear of them again."

"But you will have to hear of them a good deal, won't you? Did I not hear that the boy Henry means to fight the matter out? Suppose he wins the day.

"He can't win the day!"

"Ah, well! One never knows how events may turn, you know," said Lady Beltane, more with a view of saying a vexing thing than with any distinct significance. She was surprised to see that Lady Kesterton's face turned white, and that her eyes dilated as if in fear.

"Beatrice! Beatrice!—do you know anything? Has anything been discovered?"

"Discovered? No. How can you be so silly, Eva? What is there to discover? If you had the truth from Sir Anthony's own lips what else can there be to know?"

"Of course—of course! I only thought you meant that something new had come to light. My nerves are out of tune, I think," said Lady Kesterton, pressing her handkerchief to her lips in order to conceal their trembling.

"I should think they were indeed," said Beatrice, giving her a keen look. "But I would not talk in that way if I were you, Eva. It sounds, somehow, as if you were—afraid."

And with this Parthian shot she left the room. Lady Kesterton buried her face in her handkerchief and moaned aloud. "I am afraid. I am afraid all day long," she whispered to herself. "Oh, if anybody were to suspect—what should I do?"

And meanwhile Beatrice was thinking, "If I were a suspicious person I should say that Eva knew more than she chose to say about the Pastons' affairs. I'm inclined to believe the version of that blue-eyed boy rather than hers. However, it's no business of mine, and I'm sure I don't want to see her and her children turned out of Kesterton Park and the Pastons ruling here instead. Fancy Elfrida and Philip at the head of affairs! That is what it would come to, I suppose." She stopped and made a pettish gesture. "What a ridiculous idea! Ah, here comes Master Phil himself. I must have a word with him!"

Philip was coming down as she went upstairs. They

met on a broad central landing, dimly lighted by a window of colored glass. Philip would have passed her with a mere word of recognition, but she detained him by a remark to which he felt himself forced to reply.

"So you have taken Beaulieu's place?" she said.

"Lord Beaulieu has behaved with great heartlessness," he answered.

"And you felt it incumbent upon you to atone for his misdeeds?"

He looked at her gravely. "I cannot atone to Elfrida for anything that Lord Beaulieu has done," he said; "but I can try to make her happy."

"Am I to call you Don Quixote, then, or the Bayard of our time?"

"Lady Beltane, your words are unworthy of you," said Philip, with increasing seriousness. "You know that I love Elfrida with my whole heart: I am honored by her consent to become my wife."

"You really mean it!" she said, looking him curiously in the face. "Yes, I believe you do. But there are few men who would act as you have done."

"I do not agree with you."

"What! to marry a nameless, homeless, penniless girl, who does not even love you-"

"I have a strong belief that she will love me in time. And after all, Lady Beltane, love is not such a selfish thing as you suppose. It can give itself—as you ought to know-without hoping for any return."

There was a short silence, and then Beatrice looked

up with a slow, sweet smile.

"You are right," she said, "as you always were—and I am as invariably in the wrong. Will you be friends

with me still, Philip, and tell me sometimes what you are going to do? I don't want to lose you altogether."

"I shall be very glad to be 'friends' with you," said Philip, smiling a little, "if only—"

"If only Elfrida will let you!"

"I was going to say—if you will be Elfrida's friend as well."

"Of course I will, if Elfrida herself permits. So you are going away? Do you know where you will go?"

"Not in the least; I shall settle that to-morrow when I go up to London."

"I wish I could ask her to my house; but in the present state of internecine warfare, I suppose that is impossible. How absurd it is! Surely they don't mean to persevere in that silly claim of theirs?"

"I do not see the absurdity of it. They will persevere so far as to make some inquiries, which can easily be discontinued at any moment," said Philip steadily. "If a marriage had taken place, it would be far less discreditable to Sir Anthony than the present state of affairs."

"Ah, but it would dispossess little Gerald, you know," said Lady Beltane, half lightly, half bitterly. "No wonder Eva Kesterton keeps her own counsel."

Philip started. "What! you think-"

"I think nothing," said Beatrice, looking into his eyes with the lustrous gaze that he knew so well; "but I—I will help you if I can."

And she passed on, having re-established an influence over Philip which Elfrida might have regretted had she known of it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONTENT.

When Philip led Elfrida away from the library he was feeling half-afraid of his own success. He fancied at any moment she might turn round on him and say, "I made a mistake. I did not know what I was saying—I cannot marry you." It was under the stress of this feeling that he stayed her steps for a moment outside the door of Henry's sitting-room, to which, with some vague notion of seeking sympathy or counsel, they had both instinctively turned; and once more putting his arm round her, he said, almost timidly;

"Dear Elfie, I will try to make you happy."

She started and drew herself away from him, "Happy?" she said, with a certain kind of alarm. "I shall never be happy again."

"You will make others happy—Henry and myself," said Philip, feeling it well to press this point home. But her reply was not very encouraging.

"It is all that is left," she said. Then she looked round her with a terrified air. "Why am I here? This is Henry's room! Oh, I can't go in—I can't see him yet. You must tell him—explain it all to him. I am going to my own room."

"Will you not come in and see Henry, dear?"

"No, no, I can't!"

"But I may tell him-"

"Tell him anything you like, but let me go! Oh,

let me go!" cried the girl, wrenching herself away from his arm with unaccustomed violence—although his hold on her was extremely light—"I must be alone a little while—tell him I'll come back soon." And away she went, scudding along the passage like a frightened hare, while Philip watched her with a strangely uneasy sensation. Had he done well, he wondered, to wrest a promise from her just when her heart was wrung by the desertion of her fine lord-lover? Would she not one day turn upon him and reproach him for having secured her by guile? If he had waited even a day longer, would she not very likely have said him nay?

But his heart rose up strongly and proudly, even as he asked himself these questions; and it said No, I am doing her no wrong. She will learn to prize a man's true love, and unless I am mistaken in her nature, she will love me back again some day. I can wait—yes, I can wait. Some day she will give me what I crave; she will be as loving some day as she will be true—But, poor child, in the mean time she will suffer and I shall not be able to help her much. God guide us through the troublous days that I see before us!"

He opened the door and entered Henry's room. He had not been there five minutes before the boy divined something of the truth. For at first Philip felt that he could not tell him; he had to wait and gather his forces together before he could feel strong enough to tell his tale. He knew that Henry would feel the slight offered to his sister by Lord Beaulieu with exceeding keenness.

He was not mistaken

The boy drew his lips together with an expression of deep pain.

"I never thought it of Beaulieu," he said, in a low tone. "He always seemed to me so brave—so manly and honorable."

"He has acted like a cad!" said Philip, warmly, "but then, we must remember that the case was probably put very strongly to him by Lady Kesterton."

"Yes, but he might have heard our side first before he went away," said Henry. "Perhaps, if he had talked to me—"

"I'm afraid it wouldn't have made much difference, Hal"

"Don't you think so?" Henry sighed, and was silent. Then, with a rather bitter smile, "When we have proved our case, and Elfie is the heir of Kesterton, he will feel that he has made a mistake."

"Will that day ever come, Harry?"

"I believe it will. There must be a proof somewhere. If you had heard my father speak, Phil, you never would have doubted."

"You are quite sure you understood him aright?"

"Quite sure," said Henry decisively. And Philip said no more. He wondered a little, however, when the boy murmured, as if to himself, a few seconds later, "Poor Lady Betty!"

"And why 'poor Lady Betty?" he ventured to ask.

"Because she believes in him." Then, after another pause, "Is Elfie not coming to speak to me?"

"She is in her room—she wants to be alone for a little time. One cannot wonder at that."

But Philip grew very restless as the day went on and Elfrida did not appear. He almost wished that he had taken Lady Beltane more into his confidence, and asked her to go to Elfrida's room. It was well for him that he did not. In the girl's present high-strung state it would have seemed to her that Lady Beltane represented all that was odious in the relations of women to men. Beatrice had been loved by Philip; she had flirted with him after her marriage. And he had allowed it. Men were all alike, she supposed; all ready to amuse themselves at a woman's expense, and to leave her when she proved troublesome, or they were tired of the game. If Beatrice had appeared at Elfrida's door, the girl was capable of rising up and putting an end to her newly-formed engagement there and then. It was fortunate, therefore, for Philip that he did not ask Lady Beltane to go.

Beatrice very nearly went of her own accord. She knew that her appearance would not be very pleasing to Elfrida, and, perhaps for that very reason, she would not have been very sorry to present herself. But, with all her faults, Beatrice had a heart. She loved Philip more sincerely than she had ever loved man, woman, or child in her life before; and his engagement to Elfrida was a sorrow and a mortification to her. As long as Elfrida had been on the point of engaging herself to another man, Lady Beltane had been (after the first) disposed to defy her power over Philip. There was always a chance that Phil would return to his old allegiance. But when he had induced Elfrida to promise to marry him, Beatrice felt that she was, as she would have expressed it, "out of the running."

Elfrida was lying upon her bed, straight and cold and stiff, as if she had died and her body awaited burial. She had a faint sense of having died to everything that was beautiful and enjoyable in life. Beaulieu's desertion had cut her to the heart. The only thing that saved her from despair was her remembrance of others that she had known; bright unselfish beings like Lady Betty and her brother Henry, a man of noble mind and high motives, like Philip Winyates, a devoted, kindly-natured woman like poor old Terry. That "such of these had lived" was her only comfort in that hour of woe.

There was a still more potent consoler for her in the thought of those who required her help. Without her, she knew that Henry would be desolate indeed. She must live for him, if for no one else. Otherwise, she thought to herself, there would be no reason why she should not find some way of ending her life, as other disappointed men and women had done before her. Most young people think these things when they meet with the first great obstacle in life; it is only later that they learn how placidly life can flow in opposite directions from that which they wished it to take.

Her consent to marry Philip was to her mind at that moment a mere detail. Why should she care? What would it matter whether she married Philip or not? Since her life had gone to pieces in this way, she might as well do the thing that seemed best for her to do. She had not the energy to refuse him. It was he who would give Henry a home—and Henry was the only person for whom she cared or felt any responsibility. This was the best way of providing for Henry; as for herself, it did not matter. She could never be happy again; as well be unhappy this way as another.

And through all these reasonings and imaginings there was at the back of her brain an increasing throb of shame. Lord Beaulieu's desertion of her had brought home more clearly than anything else could have done

the aspect of her position before the world. She had no family, no friends, no name. Oh, why had she not been left in ignorance? Why must Sir Anthony have told his story to Henry, and why must Henry have misunderstood it so wildly and so cruelly?

She had quite decided that Henry was mistaken. At first she had been disposed to believe what he told her, but after hearing Lady Kesterton's version of the story, and finding that there seemed absolutely no proof of Sir Anthony's marriage with Mary Derrick (or Mary Paston, as she had so long been called), Elfrida had begun regretfully and tenderly to say to herself that, after all, poor Harry might perhaps have been feverish and over-excited—that he did not know much of the world, and that he had probably failed to understand. If there had been but a shadow of support to Henry's story she would have stood to it bravely; but there was, as far as she knew, not a line of writing, not a single witness, in the world. It was all a mistake, or worse than a mistake; for, if it could not be proved, it sounded so like a lie! She did not blame Henry in the least, and of course she could not suspect him of deliberate falsification—that was an utter impossibility, not only to Henry's sister, but to any one who knew Henry well; but she did heartily wish that Sir Anthony had not opened the subject at all, and that Henry had been content to bear the name he had been called by all his life.

With this discouragement of feeling upon her it was perhaps no wonder that Elfrida entirely forgot the envelope that had been sent to her on Mr. Watson's death. The address that it contained, and the request that she would use it if she were in trouble, had passed completely out of her mind. It recurred to her memory

at a later date, but just when it might possibly have been of use to her, she did not think of it.

In the evening she bestirred herself, bathed her aching head and eyes, changed her dress, and went down to Henry's room, wondering, with a little pang of remorse, whether he had missed her. She found him alone, in a darkened room, with the fire nearly out. "Is that you, Elfie?" he asked patiently, when she came in.

"Yes, darling. How cold you are!"

"Philip is out, and I think the servant has forgotten me."

"Have you had tea?"

"It's over there on the wicker table. I couldn't get it for myself, you know; so I have been waiting for you."

"Oh, my poor Hal, and it is nearly 7 o'clock! What a wretch I am!"

"You had a headache, dear-Phil told me."

"Yes; but that is no excuse for my neglect of you," said Elfrida, soberly. "I am very sorry."

She lighted the candles, stirred up the fire, and put the kettle on the embers, resolving to make fresh tea for herself and her brother. But a number of hindrances came to delay her. The fire was low, and the kettle would not boil; repeated rings at the bell brought no answer; and when Elfrida at last ventured into the housekeeper's regions to ask for more tea, she was met with rudeness which drove her back to Henry's room, saying to herself that she would never ask for anything again so long as she was in that house. She had got at last what she wanted, and was proceeding to pour out the freshly-made beverage, with hot cheeks and trem-

bling hand, when a knock came to the door; and almost immediately afterward there appeared James, Sir Anthony's man, who carried, with all his usual solemnity, a silver tray, on which stood a silver teapot and hot-water jug and sugar-basin, and a plate of dainty little cakes.

"Who are those for? Mr. Winyates is not here," said

Elfrida, with a momentary sharpness of accent.

"It's not for Mr. Winyates, ma'am; it's for you and—er—Sir 'Enry, if I'm not taking a liberty."

An inarticulate exclamation broke from Elfrida's lips. Henry turned scarlet and then white. It was the first time that he had heard himself called by the title which he knew to be his by right.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure, sir," said James, carefully adjusting the tea-service on a little table at Henry's side. "I know that just at present we ain't supposed to use the name; but no doubt that's only a matter of time. I took the liberty of bringing up these cakes and a little good cream, ma'am, having heard that Mrs. Bates was not in the best of humors over such a late tea"—it was skilful of James to put the matter in that light—"and if there's anything you want doing, ma'am, as long as I am in the house I shall be only too pleased to do it."

"James," cried Henry, restored to sudden animation by this mark of belief in his claims, "have you any reason for this? Did Sir Anthony—"

He paused, for Elfrida had given him a warning look. "No, sir," said James, grasping the meaning of Henry's question in spite of Elfrida's glance, "Sir Anthony didn't never say anything to me, sir; but if it's a question of your word and my lady's, I'd sooner take yours any day, Sir 'Enry, and I shall be glad to see you come by your own."

So saying, he bowed and gravely withdrew, while the brother and sister, left alone, looked at each other with a mixture of comic and tragic sensations which kept them silent for a moment or two.

"Poor James! He believes in me almost more than my sister does," said Henry at last, with a faint laugh. At which Elfrida impulsively hastened to him, and laid her head on the pillow beside his face.

"Darling, I do believe in you!" she said.

"I wish others had James' faith," he answered sadly. He had spoken very little of the claim which he had put forward. When once he understood that his word was not believed, he had seemed to shrink into himself, to become absorbed in a mournful, observant silence which was not very natural to his disposition. And Elfrida was not anxious to discuss the subject.

When tea was over, Philip appeared, asking with some timidity if he might come in. He was agreeably surprised by the calmness of Elfrida's demeanor. He had half expected to find a tragic muse—a passionate woman with reddened eyes and dishevelled hair and garments—a Niobe all tears. But he saw only a pale, quiet girl, sitting by her brother's couch, holding his hand in one of hers, and supporting her chin on the other. She looked tired and languid, and her eyes were heavy, with dark shadows underneath; but there was no trace of passion or excitement about her. From the expression of Henry's face, Philip surmised that their talk had been about him. He was emboldened, therefore, to put his hand gently on Elfrida's shoulder, and to say:

"I think Henry is glad, dear."

"Yes, I am very glad," said Henry, quickly.

But Elfrida showed no responsiveness. It was in the

hopeless look of her downcast face that Philip read the depths of her secret sorrow. She sat silent, as if she could find no word to say.

An odd little stillness fell over the group. Philip waited, almost as much confused as he had ever been in his life; Henry, anxious and perplexed. Then at last Elfrida lifted her head and spoke.

"You want me to say something, and you know I haven't anything to say. Why should I pretend with you too? You both understand what I feel."

"My poor Elfie!" whispered Henry, but Philip could

not speak.

"I have said I would marry you," said the girl, looking at Philip, "but you know very well that I don't love you as—as one ought to love the person one marries. I like you, I respect you, I—I'm awfully grateful to you for all you have done for Henry and me; but that—that's all. If it isn't enough, tell me so—set me free. I don't want to do what is wrong; but I don't feel as if I knew what is wrong and what is right."

"Dear Elfrida, you are doing what is perfectly right," said Philip, in a strong and assured tone of voice. He felt sure that strength was what she needed. He took her cold little hand in his own and held it fast as he spoke. "I am quite content with what you give me; God knows it is more than I deserve. I will try to make you happy, dear. You shall not regret that you have promised to be my wife."

He drew her closer to him, and kissed her tenderly. She shivered a little and hung her head; but immediately afterward, almost as though she repented of her coldness, she lifted her pale face and gave him back his kiss of her own accord.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TOO LATE!

PHILIP was told of James' attentions, and interviewed the man in the hopes of getting some information from him respecting Sir Anthony's habits and secrets; but James avowed himself unable to give him any help. He knew nothing of Sir Anthony's past life, he said; he had not been many years at Kesterton Park, and had never been taken at all into his master's confidence: but "if it came to matters of truth-telling," he maintained, "he knew who could speak the truth and who couldn't; and he'd a deal rather trust to Mr. 'Enry,-Sir 'Enry, he would like to say-than to my lady, who didn't much mind-"

Here Philip checked him rather sharply, for he did not want to hear the opinion of the servants' hall respecting Lady Kesterton's truthfulness. But as he was turning away the man spoke again.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but if you should be want-

ing a servant, I'm leaving here this week-"

"I'm afraid I can't do with a man, James," said Philip, with a laugh. "I'm going to live economically."

"But Sir 'Enry—he's—"

"You had better say 'Mr. Henry' for the present," said

Philip, quickly.

"Mr. 'Enry, I beg pardon, sir-though of course-But what I was going to say was, sir, that Mr. 'Enry will want somebody to wait on him. I don't see how you're to manage without some one now that old Mrs. Terry's gone; and if you didn't mind engaging me, sir—"

"I should be very glad, James," said Philip—for he knew that the man was a clever and faithful servant in his way—"but, you see, I'm not a rich man, and am only going into lodgings, so I'm afraid I could not afford to have an experienced man like yourself, and you also would not be very comfortable."

Curiously enough, James stood his ground. "I can make myself comfortable in most places, sir. And if you'll excuse me mentioning it, I'm not at all particular about wages, for the present. I feel to want a nice quiet place where I could have a rest. Sir Anthony wasn't always very easy to please, you know, sir, and I would like a young gentleman like Sir—Mr.—'Enry to wait on for a bit. And I shouldn't be above doing a hand's turn about the house to help the maids, under those circumstances, and I can turn my hand to most things when I try."

Philip meditated for a moment. "I'll speak to Mr. Henry and see what he says, James. But I don't quite see why you want to come to us."

"Well, sir, if I may speak straight out," said James, with the flicker of a smile on his smooth, inexpressive countenance, "I think it would be rather to my advantage to come, because I fancy my lady isn't going to give me a character."

"Eh? Why not?"

"There's been a bit of ill-feeling in the servants' hall," James explained, "respecting the way things has turned out with respect to Mr. 'Enry. Some of us think

that Mr. 'Enry would die sooner than tell a lie, sir—he's a real gentleman, is Mr. 'Enry—and that he told the story as he heard it from Sir Anthony; and some of us think the contrary; but the long and short of it is, sir, that those as believe in Sir 'Enry has got to go without a character, because my lady calls it impudence in us, sir, to have an opinion on the subject."

"I see. That'll do, James. I'll talk to Mr. Henry," said Philip, wishing to cut the conversation short. And James retired with his usual respectful bend of the head and shoulders. He was really a very accomplished "gentleman's gentleman," and had some knowledge of nursing too. He would be invaluable for Henry; but what made Philip hesitate was not so much the payment that the man's services were worth, but a suspicion that he had some undercurrent of motives that did not appear on the surface. The reason that he gave for wishing to accompany Henry to London did not seem quite sufficient. In spite of his denial, he was inclined to suspect the man of knowing more of Sir Anthony's affairs than he chose to allow. Perhaps he had some reason for supposing Henry to be the legal heir, and hence his desire to remain with him. But on second thoughts, Philip cast this idea from him, and blamed himself for want of charity. Why should he suppose that poor James had not a sincere liking for Mr. Henry, and a desire, as he said, to take a quiet place for a time at the cessation of his weary years of attendance on Sir Anthony?

Henry was pleased at the proposition, and, on further inquiry, James' demands proved to be so very moderate, that he was accepted as an attendant on the invalid and general helper to the other servants of the house.

This was great condescension on James' part, and somewhat inexplicable to his fellows at Kesterton Park; but he vouchsafed no explanation, and simply remarked that he wanted a change, and he didn't mean to over-fatigue himself.

There was only one day for Philip in which to make arrangements, and for the present he meant to content himself with settling Elfrida and Henry in the apartments which he often occupied during his visits to town, while he took up his abode at a hotel in the vicinity. He had written to the landlady of the rooms and received a favorable response, therefore he was not obliged to go up to London for that one day. And, indeed, he had enough to do during those few hours to be glad that he need not leave Kesterton sooner. There were some accounts to be gone into, papers to be given up, packing to be done; he was overwhelmed with work, and had scarcely time to see Elfrida and Henry from morning to night. He knew that Elfrida was almost as busy as he was himself, for she had Henry's affairs to look after as well as her own; and he was rather glad to think of her being well occupied. It would prevent her from brooding over the sadness of her situation.

In the course of the day, Philip met Lord Beaulieu. He would have preferred to avoid him, but there was no possibility of doing so, for the young man had espied him from afar in the streets of Southborough, whither Philip had gone to transact business at his banker's, and bore down upon him with infinite resolution.

Philip had no mind for a scene in public, and therefore, although he was very bitter against Lord Beaulieu, he raised his hat slightly in response to the younger man's eager greeting, but managed to look unconscious of the proffered hand. He thought this coldness of manner might suffice as a hint, but Beaulieu was blind to hints, and only said in the bluntest possible way:

"Anything the matter?"

"Only," said Philip stiffly, "that if I were Miss Paston's father or brother, I should feel justified—"

"Oh, good Lord, Winyates, don't go on!" said the young man, his fair face assuming an almost purple hue. "I was going to write to Miss Paston this very day—I was, indeed! Lady Kesterton said she would talk to her—make her understand, you know!"

"It hardly needed Lady Kesterton's studied insults to make her understand that you were acting like a cowardly cur," said Philip, who was at a white heat of rage, and did not care in the least whether Beaulieu tried to knock him down or not. He quite expected to be struck the moment the words were out of his mouth, But Lionel, although he turned pale with anger, only fell back a step or two, lifted his hat politely, and allowed Philip to pass on.

But the words had roused a storm of feeling in the young man's breast—feelings which he did not care to analyze too closely, but which impelled him to sudden and reckless action of a kind which Philip would not have thought him capable of. He had his horse in town; he mounted it at once and rode off to Kesterton Park, with the fixed intention of laying himself, his title, and his fortune at Elfrida's feet. This time he would see her, he said to himself; this time he would not be put off by an old woman who had very likely told him a pack of lies for her own advantage. It will be seen that Lord Beaulieu was experiencing a reaction of feeling, such as often occurs after some great decision

has been taken. And it was with this reaction strong upon him that he pealed at the heavy front-door bell, and asked in a determined voice to see Miss Paston "at once."

He was conducted to a small drawing-room and left there, while the footman, inwardly on the tip-toe of expectation, went off to find Elfrida, who was just then packing a box, and was extremely tired, sad-hearted, and dusty. She received the announcement of Lord Beaulieu's visit with a feeling of mingled astonishment and anger. Indeed, she was almost inclined to send down a message to the effect that she was too busy to see him, but a moment's reflection told her that this would not be a wise thing to do. She stood silent for a minute or two, then instinctively smoothed back her hair and shook the dust from her dress. She was wearing an apron, with a bib, and her hands were encased in gloves, for she had been handling dusty books and boxes. The gloves she removed, but the apron she kept. Lord Beaulieu might see that she was busy, for all she cared—there was no need to make herself look pretty for him now.

She went slowly and quietly down to the blue drawing-room, where Beaulieu was awaiting her. The young man was looking very nervous, and stood flecking his boots impatiently with a riding-whip, which he threw away from him as she came in, and advanced toward her with both hands outstretched. Elfrida stood still and looked at him—but she kept her hands in the pockets of her apron.

"Elfrida! Won't you even shake hands with me?" said Beaulieu, in tones at once piteous and reproachful. She still did not speak for a minute or two, and he

had leisure to contrast her present appearance with the one which she had usually worn for him. Usually she had been bright, sparkling, full of life and color; now she was pale, grave, silent, but very dignified. Even her plain black frock, partly covered with the big apron that looked so incongruous in Lady Kesterton's pretty drawing-room, did not detract from the stately grace of her bearing. As Beaulieu looked at her, he swore in his heart that whether she was a dairy-maid's daughter or not she had the manners and appearance of a queen.

"Excuse me," she said at last, as simply as if she were saying the most ordinary thing in the world, "but I do not care to shake hands with people who despise me."

"Elfrida, how can you say that? You know that I don't despise you."

"I know nothing of the kind, Lord Beaulieu. I understand you told Lady Kesterton yesterday—"

"Never mind what I told Lady Kesterton yesterday!" he cried, interrupting her recklessly. "I was mad yesterday—I did not know what I was saying. To-day I have come to ask you—to ask you again—to be my wife."

"What has happened between yesterday and to-day," said Elfrida, with a slight curl of her lip, "to make me worthy of this honor, when I was not worthy yesterday?"

"Oh, Elfrida, will you not forgive me? I was blind—I was overmastered: I did not know what was for my true happiness—but I know it now."

"Overmastered! And you might be overmastered again!" said Elfrida scornfully. "It is too late, Lord Beaulieu. If you had not the courage and strength to be true to me yesterday, you might not have it to-morrow. Besides, I do not choose to marry a man who feels his

marriage with me to be a mésalliance—a disgrace. I may be of lowly origin enough; but I am too proud for that."

"Any man might be proud to call you his wife," said Lord Beaulieu. "Elfie, believe me, it was only a moment's hesitation—I only took time for thought. I love you with my whole heart and soul, and you love me too. You won't refuse me now?—surely that is too great a punishment for so small a fault."

"There is no question of punishment in the matter," she said, turning away from him. "It is just the necessary consequence of what has gone before. You could not marry me without feeling ashamed, Lord Beaulieu, and I do not wish to be the wife of a man who is ashamed of me. I don't blame you one bit—I think you are quite right: you ought to marry somebody in your own position—some one like—like Lady Betty, you know, whom everybody knows about; but you ought not to marry me."

"And why not?" said Beaulieu, waxing hot on his own side as soon as he met with opposition. "Why ought I not? Simply because of the foolish prejudices of the world. My darling, we will disregard those prejudices; we will live our lives in our own way. I am accountable to no one; I will marry whom I choose. Elfie, you shall not say no; you know you are mine, you belong to me and me only, you cannot throw me over now!"

He had come closer to her and taken her hand in his as he spoke; she was obliged to turn her face to him, and he saw that it was white and quivering, and that the tears were in her eyes.

"Oh, Lord Beaulieu," she said, "I would never have thrown you over, as you call it, if you had not thrown me over first!" "First! What do you mean, my darling? You will forgive me, will you not, and let me make you happy? Elfie, my own, my sweet, why do you cry? You are mine, dearest, and we will be married at once—at once, do you hear?"

She shook her head. "It is best not," she said hurriedly; "and besides—it is too late!"

"Too late! What on earth do you mean?"

There was a touch of roughness, of fierceness, in his voice, which put Elfrida on her mettle. She took her hand away from him, and drew herself up to her full height.

"I mean this," she said: "that when your lordship was alarmed at the prospect of marrying a girl with a history like mine, when you rode away yesterday without trying to see me, and let me learn your change of mind through the harsh and insulting words of a woman who has always hated me, even then there was one man whose tenderness did not fail, who was true to me in spite of poverty and disgrace, and who took that moment of my deepest humiliation to tell me of his love and ask me to be his wife. And although I do not love him as he deserves to be loved, yet I was so grateful to him for his goodness to me that I did not refuse the shelter that he has offered, and I mean to be true to him, just as he has been true to me."

"So it is Philip Winyates, is it? "said Lord Beaulieu slowly.

"Yes, it is Philip Winyates."

"Although you love me?"

"I did love you once," said Elfrida, raising her eyes and looking at him steadily, "but I think you killed my love when you went away yesterday without a word," "It was easily killed!" said the young man, with a bitter laugh. Then he picked up his hat and riding-whip. "There is nothing for me to do but to go, then, I suppose!" he said, looking a little pale about the lips. "I have had my last word?"

"The very last!" said Elfrida unflinchingly.

"I did not know you were so hard," he said. "I thought you would have forgiven—when a fellow said he was sorry, and all that sort of thing, you know! Won't you, Elfrida?"

"Oh, what is the use?" she said, with a little sob.
"It isn't that I want to be hard—I want to feel just
the same to you; but I can't—I can't! You were not
true to me: you left me to fight for myself just when I
wanted help; and I should never be able to trust you
again."

"That settles it!" said Lord Beaulieu. "I certainly won't marry a woman who cannot trust me. Well, good-by, Elfrida. This is the end, then—but I hope you will think as kindly of me as you can."

He looked so wistful and so boyish that for a moment Elfrida's heart almost relented to him. But she knew that she was right to let him go. Even his return counted more as another act of weakness than as a joy of her heart. She spoke quite truly when she said that she would never be able to trust him again. For she was as proud in her way as he was; and the sting of his contempt had been inexpressibly bitter to her.

They parted with a quiet shake of the hands and Lord Beaulieu went away to mourn over the inevitable. Perhaps he was not likely to mourn forever. He felt that he had been worldly-minded and cowardly, and that he had been punished for his littleness; but again he felt that perhaps Elfrida's decision was for the best. He loved her, but—after all—a man had a duty to his family, and could not always marry to please himself.

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Elfrida had been wiser than she knew.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN LONDON LODGINGS.

A DOUBLE drawing-room in a West Central square is not usually considered a very lively place, but Philip had nevertheless done wisely in establishing the young Pastons in a house which he knew to be clean and comfortable in spite of its outside dinginess. The landlady, Mrs. Graves, was not so funereal as her name. The room was furnished with heavy mahogany chairs and table, an uncomfortable sofa, a flowery Brussels carpet, half a dozen engravings, and some wax flowers. Elfrida's first feeling, on seeing her new surroundings, was one of unmitigated horror: their ugliness impressed her painfully, and she was sympathetically afraid of the depressing effect that might be produced upon Henry. But to her surprise, Henry did not seem depressed at all. On the contrary, he was delighted.

"This is what I have read about in novels," he said.
"This is the typical British house, with furniture dating from 1851, the very lowest period of art! Oh, I know all about it from the literature of the day, but I have never seen it before, and I never thought it could be so bad as this!"

He was looking about him, on the day of their arrival, with amused, curious, interested eyes.

"You must remember that I have never seen any house but Kesterton Park since I was a baby," he went

on. "Everything is so new to me—so typical. A London square, a London lodging-house, a London landlady! I feel as if I were in one of Thackeray's novels."

"But it is all so ugly!" said Elfrida, smiling in spite

of herself.

"Is it? Well, I suppose it is. But it's new, Elfie, and you forget how little change I have ever had."

"I wish it were a pleasanter kind of change," said his sister mournfully. She stooped down to kiss him, but the tears were in her eyes.

It was their first evening in Taviton Square, and it was turning out in an unexpected way. Elfrida had thought that both she and Henry would be very miserable—Henry, perhaps, more than herself. She had looked to find him tired, exhausted, dejected by the change in his circumstances, and lo and behold! he was as cheery and blithe as if he had never known care or sorrow in his life. He was unfeignedly interested in his new home, sincerely delighted with the novel surroundings, even when they were of the commonest; and he succeeded in making Elfrida laugh heartily more than once, even when she said to herself that she had no business to be light-hearted. When Philip came in, after a visit to his hotel, he was amazed to find, instead of the gloom and silence that he had vaguely anticipated, an atmosphere of smiles and innocent jokes and general gayety of heart.

That all this had been a little forced, however, was evident to him from the sigh with which Henry at length laid his head upon his pillow when Philip had helped James to get him to bed. The lad was so unselfish that he had kept up a pretext of good spirits throughout the evening for his companion's sake; but he was glad

enough to rest quietly when he could do so without being watched. All this Philip saw and appreciated, and he went back to the front drawing-room (Henry used the back drawing-room as his sleeping apartment) with a feeling of positive gratitude to the boy who could saerifice himself so readily to the comfort of other people. The drawing-room seemed quite desolate without him. Elfrida had drawn a stool up to the fire, and was sitting with her elbows on her knees and gazing sadly into the glowing embers. She had a peacock-feather fan in her hand, and had been using it throughout the evening either to screen her face from the heat of the fire, or simply to cover her lips so that the expression upon them should not be too closely remarked by her observers. She scarcely stirred when Philip came in, but she flung him a glance which he interpreted as an invitation to sit near her. Accordingly, he drew a chair forward and seated himself almost at her side.

Her face had grown strangely sad during those few minutes during which she had sat alone. Philip wished that he was able to comfort her as he would have liked to do. He had the right—a certain kind of right—to kiss her, to put his arm round her and hold her hand in his; but he could not avail himself of his right with any other feeling than that of fear—fear lest he should frighten her, disgust her, repel her love before he had won it. This was the feeling that kept him reticent and even cool in manner when his heart was aching to take her to him and comfort her for all that she had lost.

"I hope you will like this place better by and by," he began.

Elfrida flushed suddenly, as if he had reproached her.

"I do like it—I think it is all very nice. It's much cleaner than I expected—for London."

"You will find Mrs. Graves honest and obliging. I think she will make you comfortable. She was always good to me when I was here before."

"You have been here often?" said Elfrida, feeling that she must say something.

"Six or eight times. It was my usual harbor of refuge."

"And we have turned you out?"

"Only for a time, I hope." And Philip looked at her with a grave smile which made her flush uncomfortably as she played with her fan, and said:

"I thought you were going to stop at your hotel. You told me it would be better so."

"Yes, dear, so long as I remain as I am. Elfie, would it not be better for us all, better for Henry and for me, as well as for yourself, if you and I were married?"

She started up from her seat almost as though she wanted to get away from him. "Oh, there is plenty of time for that," she said rapidly, in a voice that ought to have been careless, and was not.

"Why should we wait?" said Philip softly. He rose too, and stood before her, but she turned her shoulder to him and covered her face with her fan. For a few minutes the two stood thus, silent and uneasy, until at length, Elfrida, lowering the peacock feathers, said entreatingly, "If only you wouldn't talk about it yet!"

"How long am I to wait?" he asked. Then, as she did not reply: "It would be much better if we were here together. It would be easier to look after Henry, it would be better for my work. And we have to think

how things will look in the eyes of the world, Elfie. It would be better for you, from that stand-point, to be here as my wife than simply as Henry's sister. You are too young to be left alone. I hate the idea of going away from you."

"I am quite well able to take care of myself," she

said proudly.

"Able, yes; if you were obliged. But you are not obliged; because I am here, waiting, anxious to have the right of caring for you, of protecting you. Why should that right not be mine at once, Elfie?"

"At once!"

"Well," said Philip quietly, "as soon as we can get matters settled. In a fortnight or three weeks, say. That would leave you time to unpack and arrange your things. I could then come and take up my abode here altogether and it would be easier for us all in many ways. Otherwise I shall not be able to give you—and Henry—the help and care to which he, at least, has been accustomed from me. You see, I cannot live here as I did at Kesterton—I cannot come and go without remark; and it would not be right. Don't you see what I mean?"

"I think so—I suppose so," said Elfrida rather confusedly. "But I never thought of it in that way."

He ventured to lay one hand on her slender wrist.

"You do intend to be true to me, Elfie? You mean to be my wife—one day?" he said.

"Don't you trust me?" she asked.

"Yes, yes, with all my heart and soul. But what is the use of making me wait so long? We shall never have a happy, comfortable home until you are my wife."

"You did not say all this when we came away," she said, suddenly breaking into tears. "You have taken

me unawares; I am like a bird in a net. I—I can't—I haven't the right to refuse."

And then she leaned against the mantel-piece, and sobbed helplessly for a minute or two, while Philip, bitterly reproaching himself for his precipitancy, vowed that he did not mean to press her, that she, and she only, should decide, and that he was a brute to have mentioned the matter on this the first day of her arrival in town. Elfrida calmed herself under the influence of his self-accusation, and was roused at last to contradict his statements.

"No, Philip, no—you are quite right. It is I who am wrong. I have not had time to think over things, and at first I did not see how right you were. I am quite ready to do what you want."

"But I want only to make you happy, dear; and if you dislike it so much—"

"But, indeed, I don't dislike it in the way you mean," she said, lifting her face and wiping away the tears. "It is only that I was unprepared. Now that I think it over, I know that you are quite right. You must forgive me for crying in this foolish way. It is only that I am overdone and tired. I am really quite willing—quite—to do as you suggest. I am, indeed!"

She came up to him and gave him both her hands, looking into his eyes with so sweet and supplicating an expression that he was irresistibly impelled to kiss the beautiful face upturned to his own. She blushed deeply, but she did not seem to resent the kiss.

"Elfie, my darling, will you really be my wife soon?"

"As soon as you please, Philip," she answered bravely.

"Even if I said-"

"Any time you like," she said. "It is only right; and besides, you have been so good, so noble; I know I ought to be only too glad to do just what you wish."

"Ah, but that is not what I want you to feel!" cried

Philip vehemently. "I only ask for a little love."

"If you will be content with my liking and my trust," she said rather tremulously, "perhaps—by and by—" And there she stopped.

"By and by!" he said, sadly. "Ah, yes, by and by. That is a vague word, Elfie. But I will try to be content. After all," brightening up a little as he spoke, "have I not won a great deal more than I deserve?"

"No," she said, with sudden decision, "not more than you deserve, Philip. You are the truest, noblest, the best of men, and I can never be too grateful to you for what you have done for Henry and me."

"I could wish that I had done nothing," he said smiling tenderly, "and indeed it is next to nothing that I have done, when I hear you talking in this way. But now I must go—Mrs. Graves will wonder why I stay so long; I shall have to go and explain to the good old soul that you are to be my wife some day. Some day, Elfie! I won't hurry you, my darling; but let it be soon."

And soon indeed it was. Elfrida saw clearly enough the reasons that there were for hastening the marriage, and as she was soberly and seriously resolved to become Philip Winyates' wife she made no further opposition to his plans.

The house in Taviton Square was tolerably spacious, and, as it happened, Mrs. Graves had just then no other lodgers. She was quite willing to agree to Philip's proposition that he should take her "dining-room floor" as well as the drawing-rooms, and in fact become the

possessor of the whole house except that part of it which Mrs. Graves wanted for herself and her family.

It was a melancholy time for Elfrida, though she was brave and resolute enough not to show that it was so. It was rather dreary work to choose her own wedding-dress, simple as it was; and drearier still to think of the happiness it would have been to her to choose it if she had been going to wear it for her bridal with the man she loved. Of Beaulieu she heard nothing more.

But, on the day before her quiet wedding, an unexpected pleasure came to the girl. "A lady" was announced as a visitor, and before Elfrida could collect herself sufficiently to ask the maid the visitor's name, she was overwhelmed by a sudden rush, a vehement entrance, a storm of tears and kisses, from Lady Betty Stormont.

"I'm a truant," Lady Betty confessed. "I ran away from Beatrice while she was shopping in Bond Street, and came here in a hansom. I could not rest until I had seen you again, my poor Elfie dear."

"But how did you know where we were living?" asked Elfrida.

"Mr. Winyates wrote to Lady Kesterton, and Lady Kesterton sent the letter on to Beatrice," said Lady Betty, with a little blush. "I made a mental note of the address, and vowed that I would come. Is it really true, Elfie? Are you to be married to-morrow?"

"Yes," said Elfrida, gravely. "To-morrow is the day."

"You say it very solemnly! Are you happy, dear?" said Betty, scanning her friend's face with eager, anxious eyes. "Do you love him?"

Elfrida tried to smile and tried to speak, but both attempts were something of a failure.

"Elfie-Elfie-do you care for Lionel still?"

The question came in a whisper, and Elfrida felt the girl's hand tremble in her own. She gathered up all her courage to reply.

"Not as I once did, dear," she answered. "I would not marry Lord Beaulieu now for anything the world

could give me. Don't ask me any more."

"One thing—only one thing, Elfrida. Did he ask you to marry him—after—after Sir Anthony's death?"

"Why do you ask, Betty dear?"

"Because Lady Kesterton and Beatrice have been telling me that he backed out of it," cried Betty warmly, "and if he did I'll never speak to him again! They tell me that Lady Kesterton got hold of him and persuaded him to go out of the house without seeing you—just leaving a horrid message, as if you were below his notice. They seemed to think he had done a very fine thing, but I told them I didn't believe it was true, and that if it were true nothing would induce me to—to—"

She suddenly faltered and broke down, hiding her head upon Elfrida's breast.

"To marry him, dear?" said Elfrida, after a little

pause.

"Yes, to marry him," Lady Betty answered, with a

sob. "He has asked me, but I refused."

There was a still longer pause. Elfrida was feeling the pain that came from knowing that the man she loved could so easily forget her. With a word, too, she might punish him; she could spoil his chances with

Lady Betty if she chose. But she was generous.

"There is no reason why you should not accept him," she said quietly. "He behaved quite honorably to me. Listen: Lady Kesterton told you what she knew, but she did not know everything. Lord Beaulieu did go away after seeing her, without having an interview with me, because he wanted to think the matter over; and that was very wise of him, you know; but he came back next day and asked me to marry him. And I—I said no."

Lady Betty stirred a little, and looked her friend in the face.

"But you loved him all the time?" she said.

"Too well," said Elfrida, quivering, "to let him spoil his life for me. Besides—no, I did not love him in the right way. I am going to marry Philip, and I hope

that one day you will be Lord Beaulieu's wife."

And the look she bent upon Lady Betty was so serene in its steadfast resolution that the girl, though still puzzled, was secretly reassured. But she shook her head and declared gravely that nothing would induce her to accept Beaulieu—now.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LADY KESTERTON'S DIAMONDS.

ELFRIDA was married to Philip Winyates about the middle of January, and settled down very quietly to her life with him in Taviton Square. Her marriage seemed, after all, to make very little difference in her life. She devoted herself more completely than ever to Henry; and she saw comparatively little of her husband. Philip had had no difficulty in getting work to do, and the consequence was that he was busy-morning, noon, and night. Henry sometimes complained that they saw less of him than in the old days at Kesterton Park, but Elfrida uttered no word of complaint. It was when Philip came near that her eye grew troubled and that her voice failed her. In his presence she became curiously stiff and unresponsive; her old liking for him had disappeared, and was replaced by something very like timidity and coldness. She was exceedingly submissive, even in the smallest things; she sedulously considered his comfort and his welfare; but she had lost her old vivacity, and this very submissiveness did not seem natural to her character.

Philip used in these days to watch her, curiously and sadly, with the feeling at his heart that, after all, he had perhaps committed a fatal error. Not that he loved

her less, but that he began to believe she would never love him more. He had fancied that marriage would fan the flicker of "liking" into the flame of "love," and he was saddened and disappointed to find that her love was so hard to win. He felt, too, that he was at a disadvantage. He was obliged to be busy in order to earn money for his household, which was a somewhat expensive one; and he could not give her the personal care and companionship which he felt she required. Henry was a great deal more to her than he could ever be. He knew that she had married him for Henry's sake, and he could not complain if she continued to give Henry the attention and the devotion which she had always lavished upon him. He could not complain, and yet he felt it hard that her voice should be silenced when he-her husband-came into the room, although she had been laughing while his hand was on the door, that her caresses should be showered upon her brother wholesale, but that not one little kiss should ever be reserved for him.

Lady Betty came to the house again, shortly after Elfrida's marriage, and announced that this time she had been allowed to call on her.

Elfrida interrupted some trivial chatter of the girl with the rather irrelevant question:

"And when are you to be married, dear?"

"Married!" said Lady Betty, flushing, as was her wont, a delicate pink. "Why, there is no thought of such a thing!"

"Does not Lord Beaulieu think of it?"

The color became hotter in the girl's soft cheeks. "I don't know what he thinks. I can't believe that he knows his own mind. And sooner than marry him and feel afterwards that he regretted the marriage, I think, Elfie, that I would rather drown myself."

"But he has asked you-again?"

"Oh, yes," rather pettishly, "he goes on asking me now. And I always say no."

"Do you mean to say no forever?"

Lady Betty's eyes grew grave and troubled. "Elfie,

I know he cared for—for some one else not so very long ago. Perhaps he cares for her still. How can I be sure that he does not? It will take a long time for me to learn to trust him."

"He is an honorable man: he would not say what he did not think," said Elfrida, in low, suppressed tones.

"Yes, but he might be mistaken as to what he thought. He must be quite sure—and I must be quite sure too."

"I think it will come right in time," said Elfrida,

soberly.

"I don't know. But let me see Henry, won't you? I only spoke to him for a minute last time, and I want to see him again."

And they went upstairs to Henry, their "private"

talk having taken place in the dining-room.

Lady Betty gave an odd little start when her eye fell upon Henry's face. The start perplexed Elfrida, and made her look at Henry more narrowly. He did not look quite so well as usual, perhaps; but then the cold weather had tried him. She would ask Lady Betty what had struck her in Henry's appearance when they went downstairs.

She did ask, and Lady Betty gave her an evasive answer.

"It seemed so queer to see him in a London room, you know," she said explanatorily. "I had seen him only at Kesterton, and of course he looks different."

"Not worse?" breathed Elfrida.

"Oh, no, dear! Only a little thinner than he used to be, isn't he? I dare say it is just the London darkness

that makes a little difference; that is all."

But when Lady Betty was gone, Elfrida went back to her brother with a new fear at her heart. Was it possible that this London life was too trying for his strength, that the murky atmosphere, the ceaseless fogs of a peculiarly disagreeable winter, were more than he could bear? She watched him anxiously, and noted, with a heart-breaking sensation of pain, that his hands and face were certainly thinner and whiter than they

had been; that his weakness seemed greater; and that his eyes were bright with fever rather than with the old lightness of heart. She looked at him so intently that at last he observed the gaze, and asked her, with a smile, what was the matter.

"Nothing," she said, a little consciously. Then, after a pause: "Lady Betty was asking whether this life agreed with you, and I was wondering whether it did." "Why not?" said her brother quietly. "Do I look

worse than I did?"

"Oh, no, no, Hal, dear; you are just the same as ever!"

"I am not so sure of that," he answered. "I remember, now-Lady Betty looked startled; and I fancy, Elfie, that I am not quite as strong as I was. That may be the solution of the problem for me."

"The solution-what do you mean, Harry?"

"I mean that if I were to die, Elfie, there would be no further perplexity about the title. You, dear, would have to try to prove Sir Anthony's story for your own sake; and for mine, too; but little Gerald could reign undisturbed."

"Dear Hal, please don't talk in that way! You are no worse—no worse at all! and as for me—I should not care one bit about proving the story if you were not

here to profit by it."

"But that would be wrong, Elfie-wrong to our mother's memory, and to our father's, too; and wrong to yourself. Promise me, dear, that—even if I die you will go on seeking the truth and will not shrink from making it manifest to the world if it should be in your power ever to do so."

And Elfrida promised. But in her heart she did not

believe that the story would ever be proved true.

Philip had spared no pains. He had advertised for a record of the marriage in every important daily paper in England; he had sent a circular to every clergyman in every parish, asking each to search the register for information; but he had not met with any success at all. No one seemed to have heard either of Anthony Kesterton or of Mary Derrick. It occurred to him with great force that if Sir Anthony had been married at all, he had perhaps given a false name. At any rate, no information about the marriage could be obtained; and Philip began to wonder seriously whether the story had been either a bad joke on Sir Anthony's part, or a delusion on that of Henry. He could not afford to pay a private agent to search parish registers for him, and no firm of lawyers would take the matter up; the story was too vague, too unlikely, to be believed. Most of the men consulted by Philip were disposed to doubt the good faith or the sanity of Henry Paston.

Meanwhile, it was no fancy merely of Lady Betty that Henry's strength was declining. The boy was growing weaker day by day. Philip knew it, the doctor knew it, Henry knew it himself as well as they; it was only Elfrida who absolutely refused to face the truth.

He seldom now mentioned the story that Sir Anthony had told him, but once or twice he sighed out a wish that he could see Lady Kesterton again. What pity and good feeling had failed to bring about at Kesterton was brought about in London through mingled influences of

revenge and greed.

Eva Kesterton was in town, spending a few days with Lady Beltane. And from Lady Beltane's house she sent Philip an angry and threatening letter respecting some diamond ornaments which had long been heirlooms in the Kesterton family. She had been in the habit of wearing them on great occasions; and had donned them (as she thought) on the night of the great ball; but she had now discovered-partly from an unpaid account sent in from a great jeweller's, and partly because her suspicions as to the genuineness of the stones had been aroused—that Sir Anthony had been allowing her to wear carefully-fashioned paste instead of genuine diamonds; and that the heirlooms themselves had disappeared. Furthermore, it was remembered that Elfrida Paston had worn diamond ornaments at the fancy ball, and Lady Kesterton wrote to know whether these diamonds were not the real diamonds, and to request that they might

be returned at once, "unless Mrs. Winyates desired to be

prosecuted for the robbery."

"It is the most insulting letter I ever read," said Philip, throwing it down angrily, when he had shown it to Henry and his wife. "What about the ornaments, Elfie? What does she mean?"

"Of course she means the ornaments that Sir Anthony gave me on the night of the ball," said Elfrida. "I thought that they were imitation; and I remember I tossed them into a jewel-box that night without thinking much about them. I have never looked at them, or thought of them, since."

"Let us hope they are safe," said Philip. "Will you look for them, dear, and see whether they are the orna-

ments she describes?"

Elfrida did his bidding, and presently returned with the pins and brooches with which Sir Anthony had chosen to decorate her on the night of the ball. Philip identified them, one by one, as those which Lady Kesterton had indicated in her letter. He then wrote to Lady Kesterton herself, requesting her either to send for the jewels or to appoint an hour at which he himself should leave them with her at Lady Beltane's house.

No answer was returned, and Philip therefore went out as usual next morning, advising Elfrida not to trust the ornaments to the hands of any unauthorized bearer, and even to go herself, if necessary, to convey the diamonds to Lady Kesterton in the course of the day.

Elfrida did not think it necessary, however, to stay in-doors both morning and afternoon in case Lady Kesterton should send for the diamonds. No letter or message came, and at 3 o'clock, therefore, she went out for her customary walk, while Henry rested and sometimes slumbered a little under the guardianship of James. And thus it was that when Lady Kesterton herself, grown bold with impunity and pride and spite, knocked at the door and asked for Mr. or Mrs. Winyates, she was taken straight up to the drawing-room and ushered into the presence of Henry Paston and his attendant. And then she realized that she had been

very foolish to come. But she had wanted the opportunity of insulting and threatening-perhaps even of frightening-Elfrida; and she had been unable to resist that temptation to wound the feelings of the girl whom she had already wronged as much as it lay in her power to wrong.

She looked around her, saw no Elfrida and no Philip—only Henry, whose thin white face and great hollow eyes looked at her in an intense stillness from the couch whereon he lay. At the sight she faltered

and drew back.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" she murmured, half against her will. "I came here by mistake. I wanted to see your sister—"

"I am glad you have come, Lady Kesterton," said Henry, clearly and quietly. "I have been wanting to

see you for some time. Close the door, James."
Lady Kesterton turned sharply. "Excuse me, I can't stay," she said dryly. "Tell your sister to send me the ornaments that she took from my house at once. Open the door, please."

The last remark was addressed to James, whose hand was on the door knob. But in obedience to a sign from

Henry he went out.

"Now that you are here, Lady Kesterton, I beg that you will stay for a few minutes," said the boy. "Elfrida will be in presently, and then she will give you the ornaments that she had accidentally taken away with her. Pray sit down."

"Sit down! As if I would sit down here! Excuse me, I am not so very anxious to wait for your sister;

you will no doubt give her my message."

"I will give her no message," said Henry, his voice suddenly growing stronger and deeper from his emotion, "unless you stay with me for five or ten minutes and listen to what I have to say. I don't think you need be afraid of me," he said, in a softer tone, "when you look at me. Don't you see that I haven't long to live?"

Lady Kesterton's cold eyes rested on him for a mo-

ment, wavered, then fell. But she moved, as if instinc-

tively, to the door.

"James is there," said Henry, very quietly. "He knows what I want—that I have been wishing very much to speak to you. I doubt a little—whether he will let you out unless I give the word."

"What insolence is this?" said Lady Kesterton, turning rather pale as she spoke. "You will let me go when

"What insolence is this?" said Lady Kesterton, turning rather pale as she spoke. "You will let me go when and how I please. So you talk over your affairs with the servants, do you? It is worthy of your father's—" "My father's eldest son and heir, if you please," said

"My father's eldest son and heir, if you please," said Henry firmly. "You know as well as I do that that is what I am. You cannot look me in the face and deny it—although you have done so to the outer world."

"I can and I will!" she cried determinedly. "This story is a mere fancy of your deluded brain. I am very sorry for your delusion, but I really cannot allow it to influence my action. I will bid you good-afternoon."

"Stay, Lady Kesterton," said Henry. "Even if you will not acknowledge that you heard aright, do you think that the world will support you when it knows that there was another listener to that conversation—a listener who heard the story as I heard it, and is willing to swear to that effect?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FACE TO FACE.

LADY KESTERTON stood aghast. There was no need now to beg her to stay. She sank into the nearest chair, and looked at Henry with an expression of utmost dismay. "What do you mean?" she said almost inaudibly.

"I have not a great deal to say," he answered. "It will be better for you to hear it—I have always felt so. But you have always refused to see me—and I could not

come to see you."

"There was no use in my seeing you—it could not do any one any good."

"Perhaps not," replied Henry, "but it would have been a satisfaction to me; and you owe me some satisfaction, Lady Kesterton. I suppose you know that I am dying," he continued, in the most matter-of-course way possible. "It simplifies matters a good deal, does it not?"

Lady Kesterton's lips moved, but she made no sound. "Since I have known that I was to die so soon," the boy went on, "I have thought how much more easily things were turning out than we expected. Even if I had had the title for a little while, you see, Gerald would have succeeded to it by and by. Would it have made so much difference to you?"

"I don't know what you mean by talking to me in this way," said Lady Kesterton. "You have not got the

title, and so-"

"But you know quite well that I ought to have it," said Henry. His tone was wonderfully winning; the sweetness of his expressive eyes was almost unearthly. Lady Kesterton had a moment of odd, superstitious fear. She felt as if she were in the presence of one who could

read her very heart.

"You know quite well," Henry repeated, "that my father and mother were legally married, and that I am Sir Anthony Kesterton's eldest son. Oh, don't say—to me—that you are ignorant of it; when you know—you remember as well as I what happened on that night—the night before Sir Anthony died. You heard his story; you could not possibly misunderstand him. It did not injure you, did it—that some one else had been his wife before he married you? And even if Gerald had not had the title for a year or two, would it have mattered so much? It was not possible that my life should have been a long one; indeed—as we know now—it is going to be very short."

"This is a most extraordinary way of addressing me," said Lady Kesterton, rising to her feet and clutching the back of a chair for support. She had resolved to brave the matter out in the best way she could. "I

should be happy to acknowledge your rights if you had any-but-"

"Ah, don't say that!" said the boy, with an indescribably gentle intonation. "It isn't worth while!"

"What is not worth while?" said Lady Kesterton, bewildered.

"It's not worth while to lie and cheat and lose your soul, all for the sake of a title and a fortune for your children, is it? Forgive me for saying this; but I am dying, you know, and a great deal is forgiven to a dying person. Let me tell you just what I mean and what I want: then I shall be happy. It is not only the title that is in question," said Henry, "but, I believe, some money. There was a certain amount for the eldest son and eldest daughter; so that if our legitimacy were proved, we should take away what belongs now to Gerald and Janey. We don't want to do that. It is not the money we care about; it is our mother's honorour own name. The title is a matter easily settledit will go to Gerald when I die. So that there is only the money. You did not want to despoil Janey, even for the sake of saving us from shame."

He waited as if for a reply; but Lady Kesterton was

speechless still. Presently he went on:

"It is our name we want, and our mother's name; that is all. Why should you take it away? We do not want money. Keep it all, if you like, for your children. Elfrida and I will give up all claim to that; but give me the name that you have robbed me of, before it is too late."

Lady Kesterton never knew why she answered in a way that might be taken as an acknowledgment of guilt.

"It is too late now," she said.

"Oh, no," said the boy eagerly, "never too latenever too late-so long as we live and can say that we are-sorry."

"I am not sorry," said Lady Kesterton thickly.

"I have nothing—nothing to be sorry for."

"But you will—some day. You will know—some day—that there are things for which—I believe—you should be sorry. I don't say all this without meaning. I pray night and morning that God will bring you to repair the wrong that you are doing—for it is a wrong—and that you will tell the world that I spoke the truth and told Sir Anthony's story aright."

"So likely," Lady Kesterton cried out, with a sudden

wildness, "that I should tell every one that!"

"Why not? Would it not be better to tell it now than at some future time—on your death-bed, perhaps, after a life spoiled by a lie-or just when your children are growing up-at a time when they will be most embittered against you—"

"Oh, hush, say no more! They will never know."

"But they may know! The story will be proved sooner or later. I am sure it will. And there was another listener, Lady Kesterton, to your husband's story. The man who has just gone out—he heard it all."

Lady Kesterton gave a strange kind of gasp, as if, for the moment, the attempt to speak choked her. Then

she broke out fiercely:

"He cannot have heard, or he would have spoken at the time. Besides—there was nothing to hear. You have concocted this between you!"

Henry looked at her silently for a minute or two.

Then he said in a slightly deeper tone:

"Is it possible that you can see me lying here-dying-

and still tell me-what is not true?"

Lady Kesterton began to sob hysterically—but not loudly; she had sufficient self-command to prevent herself from being audible outside the door. Henry closed his eyes; the interview was becoming almost too much for him to bear.

"It will be known—it will be known," he murmured, more to himself than to her. "When it is too late to save yourself—it will be known."

"Do you mean to say," Lady Kesterton asked, with a desperate clutch at her vanished dignity, "that this man is going to repeat his ridiculous tale?"

"Whether he does or not," said Henry, looking at her with dreamy eyes which seemed to see beyond the veil of actual fact, "the truth will some day be made clear. I only ask you to save yourself from sorrow."

"This is perfect nonsense!" said Lady Kesterton, who, though still agitated, was rapidly recovering her self-possession. "If you have nothing more to say, I will go, for really I have no time to listen to any more of your ravings. I am sorry, for your own sake, that you persist in so foolish an attempt to gain a position that does not belong to you."

She never forgot the strange sweetness of the smile he turned upon her. He did not attempt to reply to her words; he simply said the one thing that he had

waited for so long a time to say.

"It is for your sake more than mine," he said. "Butat any rate—will you remember that I—I forgive you all you have done? You may some day be glad to remember that—when I am dead. That is all I wanted

to tell you."

He turned his face a little and closed his eyes. Lady Kesterton took the words as a sort of dismissal and hurriedly made for the door. She had an additional shock in finding that the faithful James was sitting outside the door. To think that a man like this might perhaps be said to hold her character in the hollow of his hand; it was an unspeakable mortification to her. But on this occasion, at least, James betrayed no consciousness of the position that he held morally with regard to her. He escorted her downstairs, opened the door howed her to her corriege with the six of for the door, bowed her to her carriage with the air of finished flunkeydom that he had ever possessed. To add to Lady Kesterton's sense of defeat, moreover she came face to face with Elfrida on the pavement, and had to meet her look of astonishment and scorn. She babbled something about the diamonds,

"You came for them?" said Elfrida calmly. "Oh, take them with you, by all means! If you will wait in your carriage, or come back with me to the house, I will show you the ornaments and give them to you."

"I will wait for them here," said Lady Kesterton, trying to resume the usual calmness of her manner. She sat in her carriage, therefore, upright, but pale as death, while Elfrida went to fetch the diamonds which Lady Kesterton knew well enough she had no right to claim; and James, like an incarnate conscience, stood at the carriage door.

Elfrida came downstairs again with her jewel-cases and deposited them on the carriage seat. To her surprise, Lady Kesterton did not touch them or look at them. She was gazing before her with a blank fixity

which somewhat surprised the girl.

"Will your ladyship not open the cases to be sure that all the jewels are there?" she asked, with a strongly

satirical inflection in her clear young tones.

Lady Kesterton started, glanced at her and then at the cases with something of the same sort of aversion, and made a hurried and (to Elfrida) a rather incomprehensible answer.

"No, they will be all right, I am sure. I wish you had kept them—they are no use to me." Then, in a louder tone: "Home, Jacobs, at once!"

The gorgeous Jacobs instantly whipped up his horses, James shut the door with a bang, and the carriage

rolled slowly away.

Meanwhile Elfrida ran upstairs to Henry. She found him in an almost insensible state: the interview with Lady Kesterton had tried him beyond his strength. Ordinary remedies failed for a time to restore him, and before night, Philip had thought it well to send for the doctor who usually attended him. The doctor looked grave, and spoke of the patient's increasing weakness, but did not say anything very definite.

It was not a time at which anything could be asked about Lady Kesterton's visit, but Elfrida heard from James that she had sat with Henry for fully half an hour. She was too much absorbed in care for his physical state, however, to care particularly about the meaning of this incident. All she gathered from Henry was by a murmured word or two when he first

recovered from his swoon. "I have done what I could," he said, "I can do nothing more. Leave herleave her to God; we need not interfere."

In after days it was of these words that Elfrida

thought with awe.

CHAPTER XL.

"GOOD-BY."

IT was late in the afternoon of a day in the following week when Lady Betty Stormont made her appearance in Taviton Square. She had been summoned by a hasty little note from Elfrida. Henry wanted so much to see her, she said, before—before the end; and she had hastened to obey the summons, although her coming had been bitterly opposed by Lady Beltane and Lady Kesterton.

When the first murmurs of dissent arose Lord Beaulieu spoke out strongly, and said that, considering how well Lady Betty and Henry had known each other, and that the poor fellow seemed to be dying, he thought that Lady Betty ought to go. Moreover, he offered to accompany her-to the door-and to escort her home again. Under these circumstances, there was nothing for Lady Beltane to do but to signify her consent, and Betty was deposited at Mrs. Graves' house about 6 o'clock on a bright afternoon in May.

"Will you come in?" she said to him, as they stood on

Philip's door-step.

He shook his head. "Winyates would not care to see me," he said, "nor-perhaps-Mrs. Winyates either. You will give my love to Henry."

"But what will you do?"

"I will wait in the hansom. The man can crawl

round the square—I have a paper to read."
"I had rather you did not wait," said Lady Betty. "I shall be some time, and I do not like keeping you here."

"You don't suppose I mind waiting for you, do you?"

asked Beaulieu rather gruffly. But further discussion was cut short; for the door was opened at that moment

by Philip Winyates himself.

Beaulieu lifted his hat, and would have retired, but Philip, after a greeting to Lady Betty, would not let him depart. He followed him to the bottom of the stone steps when he had confided Lady Betty to the care of Mrs. Graves, who was laboriously in attendance to conduct her to the drawing-room, and addressed a few brief words to him.

"I think I owe you an apology, Lord Beaulieu," he said. "I hope you will allow me to retract what I said to you one day in Southborough, and to express my

sorrow for the hasty words I used."

Beaulieu's face cleared. "I don't think I deserved them—quite," he said, "but let by-gones be by-gones, if you will." He held out his hand rather doubtfully, but received so friendly a grasp in return that he could no longer doubt of Philip's cordial intentions.

"Come in," said Philip, "and wait—if you can. Lady Betty will not be able to stay more than a few

minutes."

"How is he?"

"Sinking fast. He has not much pain now, but he cannot last long. His sister is constantly with him."

Beaulieu followed Philip into the dining-room, and the two men sat in friendly converse for a little time. Then Philip went upstairs and Beaulieu was left alone.

Lady Betty had been taken first into the drawing-room, where Elfrida met her. Lady Betty exclaimed at the appearance of her friend. She was white and worn, and her eyelids were reddened and heavy from weeping and sleeplessness. "I have been up for six nights—he has been so much worse," she explained. "And he has asked so often for you that I thought you would not mind coming."

"I should never have forgiven you if you had not sent for me," said Lady Betty, taking Elfrida's hand

in hers and softly caressing it.

"Will you come to him now, then? I don't know

whether he is quite conscious, but he may be so at any moment. You must not stay long; I think he only wants to say-good-by."

"Oh, Elfie, Elfie, dear!" cried Lady Betty, the tears falling over her soft, rounded cheeks. But Elfrida did not cry; she looked as if she had wept away all her tears.

"You must be quiet and calm when you are with him," she said. "It distresses him to see anybody cry. I come away-out of the room-when I can't keep the tears back any longer."

"I will be very quiet. I won't cry," said Betty. "Will you take me to him now?" And she went, hand

in hand with Elfrida, to Henry's room.

"Don't you know me, Henry?" she said. "I'm Betty." There was a slight flicker of the blue-veined eyelids, then a smile crept to the pale lips.

"Is it you, Lady Betty?" he said, opening his eyes at last, and looking at her. "Is it really you?"
"Yes, really me," said Lady Betty.

"I wanted to see you-just once again."

"Oh, many times more, I hope," she said, trying to

speak cheerfully.

"No, this is the last time," he answered. His strength was evidently so small that the task of uttering these short sentences was irksome and difficult to him, and he now relapsed into silence for some minutes. Elfrida spoke to him after a while.

"Betty is here, dear-do you want to tell her any-

thing?"

"Yes," he said. Then he opened his great blue eyes again, full on Betty's face. "I wanted to say to youthat I spoke—the truth."

"Yes, I know—I understand."

"No, not that-you don't understand yet-you will by and by." Then, gathering up his strength for one final effort, he added, in a louder tone: "I want you to believe me. If not, why did you come?"

"I do believe you, Harry, I do-with all my heart and soul," said Lady Betty, the last shadow of doubt dispelled by the accent of sincerity and earnestness

with which he spoke.

"I am glad of that. You will know all about it some day. As long as you and Elfie and Philip believe me—I don't much care. And Beaulieu—I don't know whether he does or not."

Lady Betty could not answer for Beaulieu. She said nothing, and a tear fell from her eyes on Henry's hand.

He looked at it and smiled a little.

"You needn't cry about me, you know. I'm going to be all right—and I've had rather a bad time of it here. Tell me, are you and Beaulieu going to be married?"

Even in the presence of approaching death Lady Betty could not repress a blush and start. But she

answered gravely:

"I don't know—yet."

"I hope you will. Give him my love."

"He sent his to you."

"That was good of him—because he doesn't believe in me. But he will—some day."

"Dear Harry, all who love you believe in you!"

"Do you love me?" he murmured. "If I had been well and strong—if I had been in my father's place—I have sometimes thought that I should have asked you—ah, well, it doesn't matter now. I wish you could have told me you were going to marry Lionel, Lady Betty. I should like to think you would be happy."

"I can't think about it now. I don't know. He wants

me to marry him-but-"

"Ah, you'll do it yet," said the lad, with a glimmering smile. Then he lay quiet for a little while, but presently, with a touch of more vivacity than he had hitherto shown, he said: "You are not angry with me for saying what I did?"

"Oh, no! How could I be?"

"Will you kiss me-once-before you go?"

She stooped and kissed him. Her tears could not be checked much longer—she had to rub them from her cheeks before she laid her lips on his.

"Dear Betty!" he murmured. "Good-by." His

eyelids closed and he turned his head aside; unconsciousness seemed to have stolen over him once more.

"I think you had better go, dear," said Elfrida softly.

And Lady Betty, disengaging her hand gently from the thin fingers that she still held, crept away from the room and was led by Philip to the dining-room, so that she should be suffered to have her cry out in peace. Henry was sleeping quietly, she was told, and was not to be disturbed again.

She had not known that Lord Beaulieu was waiting for her downstairs, and at first she did not perceive his presence in the twilight gloom. It startled her consid-

erably when he came forward and said gently:

"Dear Betty, don't cry!"

"You did not know him—you did not care for him as I did," said the girl, with a fresh outburst of grief. Lord Beaulieu was too generous to feel any emotion of jealousy.

"No, I didn't know him as well as you did; but I

always cared for him," he said quietly.

Lady Betty sobbed for a minute or two longer, then said in a gentle voice:

"He sent his love to you."

"Did he? He thought of me? Dear Betty, he used at

one time to tell me that you and I—"

"Oh, don't, don't!" said Betty. "Not now; not when he is dying. I know it all—he said so just now; but what does it matter? I can't think of anybody but him,

and you ought not to want me to."

"I don't," said Lord Beaulieu. There was a footstool at her feet, and he dropped on one knee upon it, so that his face was nearly at a level with hers, and his hands seemed just ready to draw her into his embrace. But he dared not do that yet. "I don't want to do anything that he did not wish, Betty; but I should like to be able to comfort you a little if you would let me."

His hand touched her arm, and—why Lady Betty never could understand, but for some occult reason or other—it seemed to her good to lay her head down upon his shoulder and pillow her tear-wet face against it as confidingly as if it had been her mother's lap. And his arm stole round her slight figure as he whispered some

soft consoling words.

But she would not let him say a single word of love. It seemed wrong to her that they should be speaking of love when Henry lay dying upstairs, and when his words to her were re-echoing in her heart. For although she loved Lionel well, she had an inner sense that what Henry had said was true-that although adverse fate and untoward circumstances had divided them, yet if he had been strong and prosperous it might well have chanced that she would have given him her heart. And with that underlying feeling at work she was not able to think of Beaulieu just then as of anything closer and dearer than a friend. But Beaulieu knew the signs of relenting, and was more elated than it would have been wise to show—besides, he also was grieved for Henry's death in itself, although he secretly agreed with the recently whispered remark of Lady Beltane that it would be the easiest and most effectual way of settling the question in dispute.

He took Lady Betty home in the hansom, promising to let her know very soon how Henry was. But there was no need; for a note from Elfrida told the girl early next morning that Henry had passed away a little before midnight. He had only recovered consciousness for a minute or two after his interview with Lady Betty, and possibly it was the effort that he had then made (though

Elfrida did not say so) that hastened his end.

CHAPTER XLI.

MISUNDERSTANDING.

One of the persons most strongly and most curiously affected by Henry's death was his servant James. Philip had to leave his wife in order to speak to this man, whose laments were so open and uncontrolled as to disturb the other inmates of the house. Mrs. Graves summoned him into the passage, with a very myste-

rious air, early in the morning after the final scene. "If you'd but just speak to that young man, sir," she said rather apologetically. "He's takin' on so in the pantry and his sobs is just awful. The maids say they haven't been able to get a wink of sleep on account of

it, ever since 2 o'clock this morning."

"I must speak to him," said Philip. For the moment he resented this touch of something not unlike comedy intruding itself into the tragedy involved in the cutting off of Henry's young and pain-stricken life. But when he saw the man, and noted his unaffected grief, his heart relented, and he spoke to him in a kindly tone, reminding him that the boy was now at rest, and that it was useless to grieve for him even as much as if he had led an ordinarily painless and placid life.

"I know, sir, I know," said James, with a sob. "That's just it, sir. He's had such a lot of trouble that it do seem a shame he should die before coming to his rights—which I know were his rights as well as

anybody."

"You know? What do you know?" cried Philip

hastily

"I know this, sir, that the story he told at the inquest was the true one; and my lady knew that it was, although she stood out so bold that it wasn't. I heard it myself at the time; for, feeling a bit curious as to what was going on, I had been hanging about, and the door of Sir Anthony's bedroom being open, I happened to hear a good deal."

"What! you knew and never told!" Philip's voice

was stern.

"That's what you may well say, and that's what lays so heavy on my mind," said the man eagerly. "But I told Sir Henry myself, I did indeed, sir; and he gave me his orders to say nothing about it. I told him as soon as ever it was known that my lady was denying the truth. 'No,' he said, 'it'll all be found out in time, or maybe Lady Kesterton will tell what it was she heard; but I don't want,' says he—and he says it with a glint in his eye as like that of Sir Anthony as two

peas-'I don't want to owe my rights to the eavesdropping of a servant,' says he. And right he was, and

I respected him for saying it."

"It was like him," said Philip, half to himself; then, in clearer tones, "I am very much surprised, James, that Mr. Henry wished to keep you near him under the circumstances; and I must say that if you had confessed at once, to the coroner or to Mr. Watson or some other person in authority, you might have made some difference in Mr. Henry's position. But of course it is possible that you also were mistaken in what Sir An-

thony said."

"That I was not, sir!" said the man stoutly. "He said it as plain as possible that Mr. Henry was his lawful son and heir. And pleased I was to hear it, for we all of us liked Sir Henry, poor afflicted young gentleman!" And James gulped down another sob, and altogether presented so woe-begone and dishevelled an appearance that, in spite of Philip's mingled irritation and displeasure, he could not but speak kindly. He recommended the man to keep silence and to command his noisy grief as much as possible, as it was disturbing to other people in the house; and then he went back to Elfrida, who had now fallen into an uneasy slumber.

He resolved, after thinking over the matter very carefully, that he would not tell her what James had saidat any rate, until he had consulted his lawyer. He had not the slightest hope that James' testimony would make any difference to the general estimate that the lawyer had already formed of the case; and he feared to raise in her mind hopes that could not be realized.

Henry was buried in a suburban cemetery; and after the funeral both Philip and Elfrida tried to return to their accustomed ways. But it was a difficult matter. Philip had his work to attend to, but was distracted and perplexed by the desire to become a companion to Elfrida, now left, necessarily, so much alone. As to Elfrida, she did not appear to desire Philip's-or any other-companionship. She did not even care to see Lady Betty, especially as she surmised that her old friend was now engaged to Lord Beaulieu. She sat alone, brooding over the past, over the hours that she had passed with Henry and the words that he used to say, until Philip was seriously alarmed for her health, and even for her reason. She could not be roused from her persistent depression, and he began to consider the possibility of taking her away from the house where Henry had died, so that by new scenes and new interests she might perhaps recover health of body and of mind.

The fact was that Elfrida was in a state of passionate though silent revolt against the dictates of Providence.

From this state of apathy she was partially roused one day by an interview with James, who had left them and been taken on (at Betty's request) by Lord Beaulieu. James came to report on his good fortune, and to express his regret at leaving Mr. Winyates. And Philip being out, Elfrida spoke to the man, whom she had always liked for his devotion to Henry; and heard—for the first time—the story of his listening at Sir Anthony's door, and his regret at not having divulged the secrets that he had learned to the family solicitor before speaking of them to "Sir Henry," as he always called the boy. Elfrida listened in amaze.

"Have you told nobody, then?" she asked. "Why

haven't you been to Mr. Winyates?"

"I have, ma'am."

"You have?"

"He told me it would be no use to make the matter public, ma'am, as no doubt he have said to you," said James, in his softest manner—trying to make it seem that he supposed Mrs. Winyates to know all about it. But Mrs. Winyates questioned him so eagerly that there was very little room for that supposition.

When Philip came home that evening—it was a sunny evening in June—he found his wife pacing up and down the floor of his little study with an expression of bitter anger and injury upon her face—an expression which at first he failed utterly to understand. She turned toward him suddenly as he entered the room,

and stood with her hands behind her, looking straight

at him from under her beautiful level brows.

"Elfrida?" he said, interrogatively. He did not quite like the look of her pale cheeks, her set lips, her flaming eyes. Advancing toward her he tried to take her hand, but she waved him back.

"Don't come near me," she said imperiously.

have something to ask you first."
"To ask me? Well," he said, in a gentle tone, "what is it?"

"Is it true—really true—that you knew of James'

"James' story?" said Philip-rather at a loss for the moment. "Oh, you mean his listening at the door?"

"Yes, yes-and that he knew how my poor Harry's account was true all the time. Do you mean he told you that?"

"Yes, he told me," said Philip, gravely; and was proceeding to tell her how recently he had heard the tale,

when she broke in with-

"And you never told any one? You never even men-

tioned it to me?"

"My dear, there was no use in repeating it. I doubt whether much importance would have been attached to James' report of the conversation; but even if it had, it seems that poor Henry did not wish the man to speak."

"As if that ought to have prevented you from making the truth known!" cried Elfrida, with infinite scorn. "Don't you see what a difference it would have made in people's opinion of Henry? Poor darling, he felt his friends' coldness more than words can tell. I believe"sobbing-"that that helped to kill him at the end. If other people could have been told what a foundation there was for-for his story, they would have been kinder to him. Oh, you might have spoken out!"

"You misunderstand, Elfrida. The story was only

told to me by James after Henry's death."

She looked disconcerted for a moment. Then she broke forth all the more vehemently-

"But you never told it to me! You left me to learn it from a servant!"

"Dearest Elfie, what difference does it make-to you?"

"It makes every difference in the world! It shows me that my poor boy was not deluded-not out of his mind, as people used to say."

"But you never thought that he was, Elfie?"
"No, no—but yet sometimes I doubted. I thought that perhaps he had been mistaken; now I know he was not. I misjudged him and doubted him in my heart, and no doubt he felt that I was doubting and was troubled by it; and now I can never make amends."

"I don't think you need reproach yourself for want of

faith in him, dear," said Philip gently.

But the soft answer did not turn away her wrath. "It is of other people I am thinking, as well," she said, "of what they thought of Harry. You can't have cared very much for what was said of him, or you would have taken steps to vindicate his character a little,

when the vindication lay in your hands."

"You must know," said Philip, choosing his words with care, "that I have done and would do everything

in my power to that end."

"In your power! If I were a man, nothing should be beyond my power," Elfrida cried passionately. "I would move heaven and earth to find out what I wanted to know."

"Do you mean that I am not doing my utmost-my

utmost?" said Philip, with almost equal vehemence.

"How am I to know?" she retorted, "There may be other things that you have not done. You did not tell me of this!"

Then she fled away to her own room and cried bitterly-not only for the injury (as she deemed it) inflicted upon Henry, but for her own harsh words to Philip. She knew better, in her own heart, than to believe him guilty of intentional unkindness or injustice, but she felt more resentment against him than she could altogether explain.

It was in this condition that Lady Beltane found the

little household when she came with Betty on one of her periodical visits. Lady Kesterton had gone back to Southshire, so these visits were continued without

the check of her bitter tongue.

They paid several visits, therefore, to Taviton Square, and while Betty sat with Elfrida, Beatrice talked in gentle and soothing tones to Philip in the dining-room or the study. The sisters came at all hours, but somehow they always came when Philip was at home. Elfrida was glad to see Betty; it soothed her wounded spirit to listen to the gentle words of the girl whom Henry would have loved (she thought) if he had been alive, and strong and well. She was glad that Lady Beltane did not come to see her; she did not always know that Betty was accompanied by her sister-in-law; she was in the mood when one does not care very much about the outside things of daily life. But if she did not notice, others did; there were not wanting curious eyes to spy and peep, and ready ears to gather up any morsel of scandal; and one person, at least, in the house was indignant on Elfrida's behalf before Elfrida had ever dreamed that things were not going quite well.

It was Mrs. Graves, the middle-aged motherly body, who had known Philip for so many years, who was first on the alert. And it happened on one hot July day that she toiled upstairs to the drawing-room where Elfrida was sitting alone, knocked at the door, and on entering closed it behind her—a proceeding which

filled Elfrida's mind with surprise.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure, ma'am," she began, with an apologetic cough behind her ringed red hand, but I thought I'd just look in and inquire how you was to-night."

"I am very well, thank you," was Elfrida's mechan-

ical reply.

"And you continue to be comfortable in my apartments, ma'am?" continued Mrs. Graves, who had concocted this way of leading up to the subject before she came upstairs.

"Yes, thank you," said Elfrida, wearily.

"I am glad of that, ma'am. Not but what—in some ways—it might have been agreeable to me to hear that you was thinking of a change."

"Oh," said Elfrida, wide awake now, "do you want

me to leave?"

"Not necessarily, ma'am; and not on your account neither, for a sweeter lady never came into my house; but there are goings-on, ma'am, downstairs, which I cannot approve of, and never shall; and if by a word to Mr. Winyates you could stop them, ma'am, I should be much obliged, for it's making such a talk among the servants."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Graves?"

"It's all quite right and proper, I make no doubt, ma'am, but it don't look quite well, all the same, for you and my Lady Betty to be always sitting here, while my lady, her sister, stops downstairs. If you could just manage to sit all together, ma'am, for a few times, because it does look a bit funny, you know, for Lady Beltane always to go and sit with Mr. Winyates instead of coming to see you."

"I don't think Lady Beltane's doings concern you, or my husband's, either, Mrs. Graves," said Elfrida, with such a flash of her deep gray eyes that Mrs. Graves fled

in great alarm.

"But I've said it," Mrs. Graves reflected, as she lumbered hastily down the stairs, "and though she's angry she'll not forget it, and maybe she won't let it happen again. She've got a spirit of her own, she have, although she looks so meek just now."

CHAPTER XLII.

IN THE SQUARE GARDENS.

ELFRIDA had not only a "spirit," but a brain and a will of her own, and, angry as she at first felt with Mrs. Graves, she saw that she had better open her eyes a little to what was going on around her, rather than give occasion to outsiders to judge her husband's proceedings

harshly. To Philip she said nothing; but when Lady Betty was again sitting with her she remarked rather abruptly:

"Lady Beltane is here, is she not?"

"Yes," said Betty. "She thought you wanted to be

quiet, dear, and so she would not come up."

"I like to be quiet, certainly," said Mrs. Winyates, "but I should be pleased to see Lady Beltane another time. I have no intention of shutting myself up."

Betty began to explain—almost to apologize.

"She thought you would like to be alone. It is much pleasanter to sit here with you than to be in a crowd."

"Yes, it is. But if Lady Beltane is in the house, I think it is only right that she should come up to the drawing-room," said Elfrida, with dignity.

Whereat Lady Betty blushed as hotly as if she had

been detected in a crime, and murmured:

"I will tell her you can receive her now, when she comes."

"Thank you, dear," Elfrida answered; and nothing more was said.

The substance of this conversation was repeated to Lady Beltane by Betty, who wondered why Beatrice looked so odd for a minute or two and then burst into one of those hard, mocking laughs which her sister-in-law especially disliked.

"So Mrs. Winyates is waking up, is she? Ah, well, I'm quite willing to gratify her. I'll go and sit with

her for an hour to-morrow afternoon."

"I suppose we shall be leaving town soon, so we shall not see so much of them," said Betty.

"Oh, I suppose so! but I don't mean to go just yet-

not till Parliament rises," returned Beatrice.

At which Betty opened her eyes. Lady Beltane was not usually willing to stay in town after the middle of July; but she said nothing, knowing well enough that Beatrice did not like her doings to be commented upon. They went together next day at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and drank tea in Elfrida's drawing-room. Philip was out.

"So sorry not to see Mr. Winyates," Lady Beltane

drawled, in her soft, affected tones.

"He will be sorry when he hears that he has missed you," said Elfrida courteously. "But you have seen him so often of late that perhaps you can put up with me to-day as a change." This with a smile, which covered an intention to strike home. Lady Beltane parried skilfully.

"Mr. Winyates is such a good talker: he likes, I think, to have the chance of some conversation now and

then.'

"Yes, he likes it," said, Elfrida promptly; "but he has so much work to do that he has not time for general conversation, and grudges it when obliged to give it."

"Ah, ours was not general conversation," sighed Lady Beltane softly; but none the less she felt herself worsted in the encounter, and entertained henceforward a greater respect for Elfrida than she had ever felt before.

"That girl is improving," she said, in an enigmatic way to Lady Betty, as they drove home together; but from Lady Betty's look of surprise Lady Beltane saw that she had not been understood. And when Lady

Betty came again she came alone.

Elfrida kept her own counsel. But she could not help noticing that Philip was absent-minded and distant during that day and the next; he seemed vexed about something—he would not tell her what. A queer little suspicion intruded itself into Elfrida's heart when she saw this look of vexation and disappointment upon his face. She knew that there had been a love affair of long standing between him and Lady Beltane: could it be that an understanding still existed? Could it be that Philip was tired of her, and was seeking more congenial society in Lady Beltane?

Anger blazed up fiercely within her at the thought. She had been content to say that, though she did not love Philip, she respected him: but what if she could no longer respect? What misery would her life be

then—if she were tied forever to a man whom she hated

and despised!

Philip had for some days been unusually late home; his work at the British Museum kept him, he said, and Elfrida must not expect him until she saw him back. Accordingly, one evening, soon after 8 o'clock, when he had not yet returned, Elfrida possessed herself. of the key of the Square Gardens, and went out to sit on a bench for a little while in the gradually cooling air, and to watch the antics of the London sparrows in the sooty grass. She sat there for some time, almost as much amused by the children who disported themselves on the gravelled walks as by the sparrows. She had told Mrs. Graves that she was going for a walk, and, indeed, she had intended to walk a little way along the streets and squares, but the green grass of the Gardens tempted her to stay. The Square was not much used as a thoroughfare, and the occasional rattle of a cab or cart over the wooden pavement was scarcely noticed by Elfrida as she sat watching the glow die out of the western sky. She heard the clocks and bells of the neighborhood strike nine, and she noticed that the daylight was beginning to fade, but she was not yet disposed to stir. Even if Philip had come in, she said to herself, he would not want her yet. He was far too busy now to care for her society.

It was quite dusk when at last she rose and walked slowly along the path to the gate. On her way she passed a retired seat, shaded with overhanging trees; its back was toward the path by which Elfrida came, and she noticed that it was tenanted by two persons—a man and a woman. She started with the shock of a sudden recognition. She knew the couple well enough by sight—even though their faces were not turned toward her. They were Philip and Lady Beltane.

She stood still for a moment, looking at them, noting every detail of their attitudes. They were sitting closer together than was actually necessary, and Philip seemed to be speaking in a low tone. Elfrida came nearer, and then she was able to see that Lady Beltane

was crying, and that her hand lay ungloved in Philip's

larger clasp.

With a proud recoil against anything that looked like spying or eavesdropping, she walked straight up to the seat, allowing her feet to make as much noise as they could on the gravelled path. She could not well go round the seat and stand before the two, as at first she thought of doing, because the bench faced a flowerbed and some shrubs, where there was hardly room to walk; but she came behind the pair and stood for a moment, expecting them to look round at her. But Philip was evidently too much absorbed in what he was saying to take notice of footsteps on the gravel. And just as Elfrida had raised her hand to touch his shoulder-for it was in this way that she thought of attracting his attention to herself-Lady Beltane saw her. A slight-very slight-smile curved her beautiful lips for an instant. Philip did not see it, but Elfrida did; and its suggestion of a sneer cut her to the heart. There was such a look of triumph, of insolent defiance, in that little smile, that Elfrida could not bear the thought of speaking either to her husband or to Lady Beltane. She withdrew her hand and turned away, feeling in every nerve that Lady Beltane watched her every step to the garden gate.

Philip stopped abruptly in something that he was

saying, and glanced up.

"Did you see any one—anything?" asked Lady Beltane.

"No, I only thought you were looking at some one."
"A person passed close to us and stared rather hard,"
said Beatrice. "That was all. You were saying—"

Philip changed his position a little and sat erect. "I was saying—I—upon my word, I don't know! But you understand what I mean, Beatrice. I am very sorry—it is all that I can say."

He drew away his hand so gently that it seemed more as if he were courteously relieving her than discontinuing a caress. "It is growing late," he said.

"Surely they will miss you at home?"

The spell was broken. Lady Beltane felt this, but she made one desperate effort to regain her power. "Walk with me till we meet a cab," she said, "just a little way; nobody will see us in these quiet squares." She put her hand lightly within his arm, and they

walked away together.

Elfrida had gone straight into the house and up to her own room. Here she sat down, without removing her hat and gloves, and tried to adjust her thoughts. It had never occurred to her before that Philip might prove untrue to her. Untrue indeed, in the grosser sense, she did not think that he would be; but in heart, in mind and soul he might be untrue without seeming to violate any one of his marriage vows. And this sort of untruth seemed to Elfrida the worst of all. She had thought of Philip always as a very Bayard of truth and honor; was he, after all, weak, deceitful, fickle, as she had heard it said that men always were? He had loved Beatrice once: could it be that he loved her still?

She heard his footstep at last in the lower part of the house, and she began nurriedly to throw off her hat and gloves; then, after a moment's hesitation, her other garments. She could not speak to him, sit with him, look as if nothing had happened. She would say that she had a headache, or pretend that she was asleep. She must think over what she had seen before she spoke to Philip again. To the maid, who came to inquire after her, she gave the message that she would not be down again that night and begged that she might not be disturbed. Philip came in very softly a little later, and stood by the bedside a few minutes; but she feigned sleep so well that he was obliged to go away unsatisfied as to her state. It was so unusual for Elfrida to complain of headache and to go early to bed that Philip was surprised and uneasy. But he had to wait until morning for any explanation; for Elfrida would not speak to him that night.

Her breakfast was brought to her by Philip's orders, and before he went out he came to ask anxiously how she felt. Her white face and reddened eyelids were

accounted for by her plea of headache, and she shook her head when he suggested that she should see a doctor. "I shall be better now; I will rest for a little while," she said, anxious to get rid of him; and he went away somewhat startled and grieved by the impatience of her tone.

But she did not rest long. When he was safely out of the house, she got up and roamed about her bedroom and the adjoining dressing-room, more from a desire to move about than for any especial reason. She was restless with her unhappiness, and did not know how to control herself. What should she do? That was the question which she could not answer. Should she question Philip? No, that was the last thing that she could do. Besides, she said to herself, she need not question: she was perfectly sure of the facts. He could not sit hand in hand with another woman in a garden at twilight if he loved his wife—so Elfrida argued with herself. And what course could a self-respecting wife pursue under these circumstances? Would it not be better for her to leave him at once and never see him more?

As soon as ever this thought forced itself upon Elfrida's consciousness, it seemed to take possession of her altogether. She began to plan where she could go, what she could do. She had some money—not much, but enough to take her abroad to one of her old schools, where she believed that she could find a livelihood. It occurred to her that she would see how much money she possessed in case she wanted to go. A rouleau of gold had come to her after Henry's death—it was money which Sir Anthony had given to him from time to time. She might use that as she pleased; it would not be like taking Philip's money and using it against his will. How much had she got?

She looked round for her desk—a little school-girlish desk of brown wood which had been hers for many years. She knew that she had put the gold inside this desk. Finding her keys with some difficulty, she opened it and touched the spring of a secret drawer. Yes, there it lay, the neat little packet which had once

belonged to her dead brother. And what was the envelope that lay beside it? She had forgotten that she had ever put anything inside that secret drawer. Idly, mechanically, as it seemed, she took up the envelope and opened it. The sheet of paper that she unfolded contained but a few brief words.

"The Reverend Austin Clare, recently curate at St. George's Church, Bloomsbury; afterward rector of St. Fillan's-in-the-South, Bishopsgate Street, London, E. C. If Elfrida Paston is ever in trouble or difficulty of any kind, she is recommended to apply to the above-named clergyman.

R. Watson, Solicitor."

What did it mean?

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CLUE.

ELFRIDA sat down with the paper in her trembling hands, and tried to recollect the circumstances under which it had come into her possession. It was not difficult to do this. She soon remembered that it had been forwarded to her on Mr. Watson's death, and that she had put it away and thought no more about it. Henry must have forgotten, too. "Trouble and difficulty"—surely she had had enough of both! And to think that all the time she had held this address in her own hands—possibly (Elfrida thought at once) the address of the very man who had married her father and mother, or who, at any rate, could tell her a good deal about them.

But what was to be done? Should she tell Philip, and ask his advice? No; that was the last thing that she could do. The distrust of Philip, that had been latent within her ever since she had found out his reticence concerning James' story, leaped up like a living flame. No, she would not go to him; perhaps—he being one of the Kestertons, after all—perhaps he would

be sorry to make any fresh discoveries; perhaps he would refuse to let her seek out this Mr. Clare, in order to ascertain how much he knew of Elfrida's history. She felt this supposition to be false as soon as she had uttered it to herself, but she was too much embittered

against Philip to withdraw it.

She put the rouleau of gold into her purse, and then dressed herself to go out. She had no special or definite plan of action, and she had almost lost sight of her anger against Philip in the overpowering desire to find this clergyman who was to help her if she was in any "trouble or perplexity." When she had found him—and in her youthful ignorance Elfrida imagined that this would be a very easy matter—then she would think about Philip. Till then, her mind was set upon seeing Mr. Clare.

After a little thought she summoned Mrs. Graves, who exclaimed in horror at the sight of her pale cheeks

and heavy eyes.

"I'm all right!" said Elfrida, impatiently. "I have a little headache, but the fresh air will do it good. I

am going out presently."

"So I'm sure you should, ma'am; and it's a pity Mr. Winyates can't take you himself, instead—" Here Mrs. Graves bit her lips and smoothed down her apron. "Instead o' spending all his time at the British Museum, I was going to say, ma'am," she remarked blandly. Elfrida knew very well that she had not been going

Elfrida knew very well that she had not been going to say anything of the kind, and only waited to be questioned before betraying the fact that she had alluded to Lady Beltane. But Elfrida was not going to ques-

tion her on that subject.

"I wanted to know," she said distinctly, "whether you remember a Mr. Clare who once lived in this neighborhood? At least, he was a curate at St. George's Church."

"Do you know how long ago, ma'am?"

"It must be some years; he became rector of a church in the City—St. Fillan's-in-the-South—do you know it?" "I'm afraid I don't," said Mrs. Graves, "nor do I remember Mr. Clare, ma'am, but I'll make inquiries for

you, if you like."

"Yes, do, please," said Elfrida rather eagerly. "It may be about twenty-two years since he was heremore or less—I can't be sure."

"It ain't much to go upon, is it, ma'am?" said Mrs.

Graves, with an inquisitive look.

"No, not much, but it is something. And can you tell me the best way of getting to Bishopsgate Street?"

Mrs. Graves gave the requisite information about the Underground Railway, and Elfrida thanked her and prepared to go out. But before she went she

looked round her a little wistfully.

"I don't quite know when I shall be back," she said, taking up a small black bag which lay near her, and which Mrs. Graves had not hitherto noticed. "Tell Mr. Winyates not to wait lunch or dinner for me; I am going away on business."

"But you'll be home to-night, ma'am?"

"Yes-no-I don't know."

"But you're leaving a note or something for Mr. Winyates, ma'am?" said Mrs. Graves, with visible anxiety in her face. "Because he didn't expect you to be out to-night, I know, ma'am; he spoke to me just afore he went out about you going down to Richmond or some such place—"

"I should not go to Richmond even if I were at home," said Elfrida, with the remarkable clearness which characterized her speech on this occasion. "Tell Mr. Winyates exactly what I say, please; that I may be back to-night or I may not, and that I wish him not to be

anxious."

And forthwith she took up the little black bag and left the house. There was perhaps more bravado than real resolution in the message that she sent to Philip. She had never definitely made up her mind that she would stay away from him—for where could she go? But it occurred to her that the man of whom she was in search—the Reverend Austin Clare—might possibly have left his City church and gone into the country,

in which case Elfrida thought that she would go into the country too, and find him out. Anything more than this—anything like a distinct resolve to leave her husband—was far from her mind. But things do not

always turn out for us as we have planned.

Philip came home in the afternoon with a pleasant scheme in his mind. He had thought Elfrida looking unduly white and fagged, and meant to propose a long drive in the cooler hours of the evening to Richmond or to Kew. He had already been round to the livery-stables and bespoken a carriage. And coming home after an exhausting day's work, it fell upon him like a thunder-clap to hear that his wife had taken her departure from the house without saying whither she was going or when she was coming back. Mrs. Graves, of course, made the worst of the situation.

"From the way she spoke, sir, I don't think that she meant to come back in a 'urry," said Mrs. Graves, who deemed herself privileged to say things to Mr. Winyates which she would never have dreamed of saying

to the ordinary lodger.

"There is no necessity for you to talk in that way, Mrs. Graves," said Philip, who was rather helpless before the lugubrious landlady; "and I beg you will not

let me hear such nonsense again."

Mrs. Graves tossed her head. "Nonsense, indeed!" she said. "I ain't in the habit of talking 'nonsense,' sir, as you very well knows. What Mrs. Winyates said to me—her very words—was this: 'Tell Mr. Winyates that I'll most likely not be back again, and he needn't worrit himself about me.'"

Elfrida's message, thus translated into the vernacular, produced almost a paralyzing effect upon Philip. He sat down and gazed blankly before him, feeling utterly bewildered and dismayed. What could have happened to take Elfrida away like this!

"Did she not say where she was going?"

"Well, she did ask me the best way of getting to Bishopsgate Street," said Mrs. Graves candidly, "and she talked about some church there; but she couldn't sleep in churches if she was ever so pious, nor have her dinner and tea; so it stands to reason that she can't be there now."

"What church was it?" said Philip sternly.

"I couldn't for the life of me remember, sir. I was that flabbergasted you could have knocked me down with a feather, as the saying is; but it ended with the words 'in the north,' or south, or east, or west, or something—though, indeed, I didn't take very partic'lar notice."

"Oh, well, no doubt she has her reasons, and we shall hear all about them when she comes back!" said Philip, becoming conscious of the humiliation involved in talking over his affairs with his landlady, and desirous of putting an end to the conversation: but the attempt to silence Mrs. Graves resulted in an ebullition of wrath in which she said rather more than she had meant to say.

"Reasons, indeed, you may well say, and you may hear of them if she do come back, which to the best of my belief, sir, she won't!" said Mrs. Graves. "She's been unhappy for a good bit of time—poor—sweet young lady! having lost her brother and seeing them as ought to be kind to her taken up with ladies of title, and walking with them in gardens and sitting with them in my dining-room! That's what's sent Mrs. Winyates away, sir, and you may make the best of it you can."

"Woman," cried Philip, starting up in a hot rage, "go out of this room, and never speak to me again!"
"Woman, indeed!" said Mrs. Graves, tossing her

"Woman, indeed!" said Mrs. Graves, tossing her head; "and go out of my rooms, in my own house—well, I never did hear of such a thing! But to be sure, you are upset, and I can make allowances; and I bear no malice nor evil thoughts agin you when I think how your heart must ache, Mr. Winyates, at the way you've neglected your young wife for them that shall be nameless. Do you think she liked you to be sitting down here with a lady, while she talked to my Lady Betty upstairs? Do you think she liked seeing you in the Square Gardens last night? I saw her pass you! I was

in my upstairs room at the window, and I saw her go

up to the seat where you and my lady-"

"Mrs. Graves, this cannot go on!" said Philip, now white to the lips. "Oblige me by leaving me alone. is hardly necessary for me to say that I will leave your rooms as soon as my wife comes home-"

"Which I say will be long enough," said Mrs. Graves. "However, I don't wish to put you out. I only tell the truth as I've seen it myself, and if Mrs. Winyates comes back again you can ask her whether I've made a mistake."

She left the room in rather a noisy way, and Philip conjectured that she had been consuming strong liquors to an unusual extent, and assured himself that she could

not know what she was saying.

Nevertheless, he was considerably disturbed by it. Could it be true that Elfrida had been jealous of Lady Beltane? Was it possible that she had seen him in the gardens? He remembered the incident—the passing of a woman, who had stopped for a moment behind the bench on which Beatrice and he were sitting. Could it have been Elfrida who halted there, and saw him with Beatrice's hand in his? Philip grew hot about the ears as this conjecture occurred to him. Assuredly he had meant no harm; the affectionate attitude was of no importance, if Elfrida could but have known it; still, if Elfrida had seen him, he felt that she must have had cause to be annoyed and aggrieved.

Looking back he saw by several little signs that this had probably been the case. She had gone to bed before he returned, and had pleaded headache as an excuse for not coming downstairs. She had remained asleep-apparently asleep-when he came into the room, and had refused to speak to him. She had evidently been angry. But her anger did not explain the extraordinary proceeding of this day. Why should she go to Bishopsgate Street, and leave a message that she might perhaps not return that night? Philip was utterly

bewildered, troubled and anxious.

It was possible that she would return. Perhaps she would be back in a few minutes, and would laugh at him for his anxiety. Perhaps some school friend of hers had written or telegraphed to her to meet her in the City. But on inquiry he found that she had received no letter or telegram that morning. She could not, he thought, go very far away; for surely she had no money for travelling expenses. Unless-

Suddenly a thought struck him—a thought which took him with long strides up to her room. He remembered Henry's little roll of sovereigns. It had been locked away in her desk-not to be used, as she once said, except for Henry's benefit in some way or another. She would never have touched that sacred deposit for any ordinary reason. Had she taken it with her now?

He found the drawer wide open, the desk taken out and set upon the dressing-table, the secret drawer unclosed. He glanced at the secret drawer, and saw at once that it was empty. Then she had taken the gold; and she had taken it probably because she had heard something which seemed to her to point to a discovery. So much, to Philip's mind, was certain. But then a new anxiety presented itself. She was little accustomed to English travelling, to English ways of doing business: what if she got into some scrape or difficulty, in which a man's help would have been of the first importance to her! What if she were even now in positive danger? Philip chafed under the thought: he could not rest, but paced the rooms and went up and down the stairs in ever-increasing and feverish anxiety.

But his anxiety was of no avail. The evening melted slowly into night, and still Elfrida did not come. The midnight hour tolled from a hundred steeples; the night grew faint with dawn, and the July morning rose brilliantly over the great City, but still there was no trace of Elfrida. The morning posts came, but brought no line from her. And so that day passed, and the next, and the next; but Elfrida never came. It seemed as if she might have vanished out of the world altogether, so

complete was her disappearance.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

When Elfrida left Taviton Square she went to Gower Street station, and proceeded thence by train to Bishopsgate Street. She had never before been in the City, and the sight of the ceaseless crowds, the wide thoroughfares, the endless stream of vehicles over the wooden roads, startled and confused her. But after a little while she plucked up her courage, and addressing herself to a policeman asked her way to the church of St. Fillan's-in-the-South.

St. Fillan's Square was a curious little nook, such as can be met with here and there in the great City. It was not a thoroughfare and was very quiet. Even cabs or carriages seldom penetrated to this dim recess this small paved quadrangle, surmounted by tall old houses, and dominated by an old gray church of James the First's time. This was St. Fillan's-in-the-South: a broad, squat, rough-looking building, with steps up to the door, and an oriel window above the entrance. In a corner beside it, Elfrida noticed a building of decidedly ecclesiastical character, but of much more recent date than the church; it was built of gray stone, had an oak door studded with nails, and narrow latticed windows with diamond panes. Elfrida judged it to be the rectory, and wondered whether Mr. Clare, the rector, still lived there.

The church door was open—a fact which somewhat surprised her, until she heard a bell ringing and surmised that a service was about to begin. She entered, but saw nobody but an old man in a black gown who was pulling a bell-rope; so she quietly took a seat in one of the high-backed pews and looked about her. Elfrida judged that the clergyman must have slightly ritualistic tendencies, and wondered why he had services at mid-day on a Friday, and whether the church were ever full.

It certainly was not full on that day. Some old

women—pensioners, evidently—filled the front bench, and behind them came half a dozen blue-coated old men. Then, to Elfrida's surprise, a few City men appeared; men in frock-coats and respectable gray trousers, with conventional silk hats in their hands. She did not know that the ten-minute mid-day service at St. Fillan's was widely known, and was held every day, not on Fridays alone, as Elfrida thought.

Presently the clergyman came in; a tall white-haired man, with blue glasses, and a young fair-haired curate. They said the Litany; then a hymn was sung, and the congregation dispersed. Elfrida looked a good deal at the clergyman; she liked his face, for it was intellectual, refined, and benevolent. She wondered whether he were indeed the Mr. Clare of whom she was in search, and whether she should have the courage to speak to him when the service was done.

She had an opportunity for doing so if she had chosen, when the service was over, for the clergyman, after divesting himself of his surplice, came out into the church again, and conversed with some of the poorer persons, who were his parishioners. He then walked down the aisle, close by the pew in which Elfrida sat, but her heart failed her, and she did not like to arrest his attention. He went out-probably back to his own house; and the church was gradually emptied. Elfrida sat on, till at last her attention was caught by the attitude of the verger, who was standing at the door, clanking his keys as if he wanted to lock up the building.

Elfrida rose and made her way slowly to him. He waited when he saw her approaching, and eyed her

"Do you want to close the church?" she asked.

"I want to go to my dinner," said the old man rather surlily; "but I don't mind leaving the side door open for you if you want to stay a bit. The front door I will lock up, whatever the rector may say. I've been here longer than him, anyway!"
"What is the rector's name?" asked Elfrida.

"Name? White, to be sure! don't you know that?

I wonder you came to St. Fillan's, then. Why, he's been here a long time, and he's a man that folks talk about."

"Haven't you ever had a Mr. Clare here?"

"Clare—Clare, why, yes, years ago! the rector—What do you want to know for?" he broke off suddenly.

"I'll tell that to Mr. Clare when I find him," said Elfrida, her spirit rising against this unwarranted questioning.

The old man burst into a cackling laugh, and turned on his heel. "Then find him and tell him," he said.

"You'll have a rare job, I'm thinking."
"Is he dead?" asked Elfrida sharply.

"Dead? Ho! ho! You won't find Mr. Clare in this world, anyhow. Ask the rector—he'll tell you all about Mr. Clare."

And then he pulled the door close and locked it, leaving Elfrida for a moment in the horrified belief that she was locked into the church. But a glance round the building reassured her. There was a small side door standing wide open on the north side, and she could see an oblong space of sunny pavement where the blue pigeons were strutting about and arching their glossy necks. Elfrida walked up and down the aisles with an aimless desire of passing the time away. It was more than half-past 12; if she went to the rectory to inquire about Mr. Clare, she would be intruding at an hour close to luncheon-time: she thought she had better wait for a little time. She did not reflect that she would be more likely to catch Mr. White, if that was his name, at home just then than at any other hour; indeed, she had almost a childish shrinking from him, and if she could in any way have avoided the necessity of seeing him at all she would have done so.

Elfrida was naturally brave; but on this occasion her nerves were inclined to fail her. She had had a shock on the previous day. She had had a sleepless night, and had touched no food since tea-time. It was no wonder that she felt weak and unstrung, and she was not wise enough to go to a shop and fortify herself with

luncheon. Instead of that she sat down in a corner of one of the pews, and fell fast asleep from very exhaustion and fatigue.

It was 4 o'clock when she awoke, and then she found the old verger standing before her, with his fingers in his button-holes, and a very grim look upon his face.

"Young woman," he began, as soon as Elfrida started up, "though you don't seem aware of it, let me tell you that this 'ere house is a house of God, and meant for people to say their prayers in, not to go to sleep in, for hours at a stretch, as though they hadn't got homes of their own to go to, which perhaps you haven't!"

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Elfrida, confusedly arranging her hat and mantle, which had been somewhat disarranged in the course of her slumbers; "I only meant to wait until you came back, or until I could see the rector, and I suppose the heat of the day made sleepy."

"Well, you can't see the rector now," said the old man, with a chuckle of satisfaction, "because he's gone to a meeting at the West End, and won't be back for a

couple of howers yet.

"Won't he indeed? Oh, I am sorry!" said Elfrida again; and she said it with so sweetly grieved an accent, and so weary and white a face, that the old man's humor was softened and he spoke in a conciliating tone.

"Well, as you've waited so long, you may as well wait a bit longer. What's it you wanted the rector

about, hey? Couldn't I do as well?"

Elfrida looked at him with such amaze that he felt

bound to explain.

"I do lots o' the rector's jobs for him—'specially since he've not been so strong as he used to do. The rector he thinks a deal o' me, and if there's anything I can do to save him trouble I'm always ready to do it."

"Thank you; it's very kind of you," said Elfrida, only half comprehending the humor of the situation. "But I don't know that you could do anything. I want to find Mr. Clare."

The old man Gibbons seemed much amused by this

desire. "Ho! ho! He! he!" he chuckled. "And when you've found him, what then?"

"I want to find out the date of a marriage," she said

doubtfully.

"A marriage—here at St. Fillan's? And what's the good of going to the rector about that? Ain't I parish clerk, and don't I keep the books safe locked up in the vestry? Why, the rector has to get the books from me when he wants 'em. Was the marriage celebrated in our church? In what year, miss, and maybe you can tell me about what month? You can consult the register if you please."

Elfrida knew that the records at Somerset House had been examined, and that no church in London contained the entry of her father's marriage. Nevertheless, with an odd sort of desire to investigate this matter for herself, she mentioned a date that she thought approximately near, and asked to see the register of marriages

for that year.

"Come into the vestry, missy," said the old man, with more cordiality. "I'll get the book for you. There's a trifling fee usually expected for making an extract," he went on, with a sidelong glance at the girl's black garments as she followed him silently into the vestry; "but if you don't happen to have it about you, another day—"

Elfrida's hand had searched in her purse already. "Is this enough?" she said, handing him a coin as they

reached the vestry door.

Old Gibbons looked at it and looked at her. "Why, it's a suvering," he said gruffly. "You didn't know that, missy, I'll be bound. Here, take it back!"

"No, I knew," said Elfrida. "I don't mind-so long

as I find what I want."

"You must want it rather partic'lar, I reckon," said Gibbons. "Well, if we find what we want, miss, I ain't above taking it; and if we don't find it, why, I'm good for seventeen-and-sixpence change. So that's a bargain."

Elfrida smilingly agreed, and the old man accordingly

unlocked the chest in which the books were kept, drew out one and laid it on the vestry table for her. "That's the sixties," he said. "It was in the sixties you wanted to look, wasn't it? And the names now—man's name, lady's name—if no offence? For I can help you to look, if you like, miss."

"Kesterton—Derrick, or else Paston," said Elfrida, reflecting with a pang that it was possible that her mother might have used the latter name. "Anthony

Kesterton-Mary Derrick."

"Those names will not be found in the register of St. Fillan's Church," said a voice behind the pair. The old clerk started up erect, with something of the attitude of a soldier whose superior has called him to order. Elfrida, who was sitting in a wooden arm-chair, looked round and slowly rose. It was the white-haired clergyman, with blue glasses; he now also wore a green shade above his eyes. He had entered the vestry by a door which communicated with his own house.

"Pray do not rise," he said to Elfrida, with a kindly courtesy which she liked, although she half resented the interruption. "Can I assist you in any way? I know the books almost by heart, and can assure you that the name of Kesterton is not contained in them. If it had been, I should have remembered the fact, because I happened to know Sir Anthony Kesterton, the late

baronet of that name, fairly well."

"You knew him!" said Elfrida, suddenly starting to her feet. "Then perhaps you can tell me—perhaps you can help me. If I could but speak to you for a minute

or two!"

"Why not?" said the rector, in a kind voice. "Would you like to talk to me here, or will you come into my house?" He pushed back his shade, took off his glasses, and looked at her as he spoke. "My eyes are weak," he explained, with a little smile, "so I generally shield them from the light as much as I can. For that reason, I should be pleased if you would gratify me so far as to step into my study, which is close by. You will? That is very kind of you. -Put

away the books, Gibbons; I don't think they will be wanted. Whose is that sovereign? You have not been taking money from the lady, I hope? I have spoken of that before."

"Oh, it was only in case I found something I wanted," said Elfrida hastily. "I should have been so glad to reward him if I had. He has been very good to me.

I may give him something, may I not?"

The rector smiled involuntarily, but shook his head at Gibbons. "A shilling," he said, "will pay him handsomely, I am sure. . . . And now," as Elfrida handed the man a coin, into the nature of which the rector fortunately did not inquire, "now will you step this way?"

tunately did not inquire, "now will you step this way?"

"Thank you," said Elfrida. "I shall be very glad to ask you one or two questions. The clerk told me that you could tell me, perhaps, about Mr. Clare, who was

once rector of this parish."

"Told you so! Why, what does this mean?" said the rector, turning rather sternly on his clerk, who looked at once angry and confused. "Why did you not tell the lady what she wanted to know?"

"He said you could tell me," said Elfrida, upon whom the fasting and exhaustion were beginning to tell. Her head swam, and her words came faintly

from her lips.

"I should think I could! What do you mean, Gibbons? Of course I can tell you what has become of Austin Clare, my dear young lady, if it is he whom you are seeking, for I am Austin Clare myself."

But the revulsion of feeling was too great, and Elfrida fainted away on the vestry floor at the feet of

Austin Clare.

CHAPTER XLV.

AT THE RECTORY.

"Poor young thing! poor young thing! What can be the matter with her?" said the rector, as he bent over Elfrida's prostrate form, and tried in vain to bring her to consciousness. "I'm afraid you are partly responsible for this, Gibbons. You should have told her my name at once."

"Well, sir, when folks go chopping and changing their names there's sure to be trouble," said Gibbons stolidly. "I've often told you so myself, and now I

says it again."

"That's all nonsense, as you very well know!" said the rector sharply. He had had a fortune left him on condition that he took the name of White in addition to his own patronymic; and Gibbons had never approved of the addition. It was not the first time that he had made mischief by professing ignorance of the name of Clare. "Help me into the house with this young lady. I hope she will soon come round. How long has she been here?"

"Since the 12 o'clock service," said Gibbons a little sulkily. He was strong and wiry in spite of his meagre looks, and he helped the rector to carry the insensible girl into the study, where she was laid on a Then the rector rang a bell.

"Stay in the vestry, Gibbons; you may be wanted to go for the doctor," said Mr. White, as he was generally designated. "Here, Mary, I have a patient for you;

she has fainted, poor girl."

Mary was the rector's eldest daughter, a practical, rosy-cheeked damsel in the neatest of cotton dresses, who responded with alacrity to her father's appeal. "Oh, poor thing! has she fainted? We'll soon bring her round. Fetch some water, Fanny"—to a younger sister who had followed her into the study—"and some salts—and the brandy. We'll have her on the floor, papa-she'll be better there. Poor girl! did she come to see you? How pretty she is!"

"One can hardly see much of her prettiness," said the rector, who was looking at Elfrida's ghastly face with attention and surprise. He had once seen Anthony Kesterton insensible after an accident in the Highlands, and the face before him brought back the memory of his early friend. "She is very like-very like-some

one I know."

"Who is she, papa?" said Mary, as she vigorously applied all the ordinary remedies for bringing a person out of a swoon.

"I don't know, my dear. She will tell us that, no

doubt, when she comes to herself."

"She has a wedding-ring on!" said Fanny, with a note of exclamation in her voice. "And what deep mourning!"

"Hush, Fanny, she will hear you."

"I don't believe she will; I don't believe she is a bit better," said Fanny. "Look at her yourself, papa."

He looked, and was struck by the immovableness of the ashen-white face and the curious color of the lips. "I will send Gibbons for Dr. Marsh," he said quietly.

"It may be something more than a fainting-fit."

"We'll get her upstairs and undress her," said Mary, who was quite accustomed to strange guests, poor, sick, or in trouble, whom her father would bring in and commend to her care. "Send Dr. Marsh up as soon as he comes, papa. I'll call Hannah to help me—you mustn't carry her. I wonder you got her here from the vestry!"

"I and Gibbons between us," said the rector, as he

went out to give the old man his orders.

"I hope they did not stumble with her," said Mary, in the maternal tone which comes naturally to the voice of an eldest daughter with a widowed father and a large family to look after. "Run for Hannah, Fanny dear; poor girl, I wonder what is the matter with her."

Hannah, a hard-featured, kind-hearted woman who had been in the family for thirty-five out of her fifty years, came and inspected the insensible girl, and gave it as her opinion that it was not so much an ordinary fainting-fit as a kind of stupor, which was probably the precursor of a serious illness. She had had so much experience of illness that Mary looked a little sober when she heard this dictum, and Fanny proposed that they should wait until the doctor came before taking the patient upstairs.

"No, no," said Mary, her kind heart melting at once;

"we won't be so inhospitable, Fanny. She can easily be moved afterward if she is ill and we can find her relations. She is a lady—that is quite easy to see."

"Ladies ain't always as good as they ought to be," said Hannah dryly. "However, lend a hand here, Miss Mary; its the blue-room she's to go to, I suppose."

And so the three women passed out of the rector's study, and went up the stairs, bearing their burden to a bright little room looking out on the back of the house.

The doctor, who was at home by happy chance when the rector's summons came, soon presented himself, and examined Elfrida very carefully. Like Hannah, he was of opinion that she was not in an ordinary swoon, but at present, he said, it was impossible to tell. Where did she come from? where were her friends? She ought to be sent back to them without delay, for it was quite likely that fever and brain disturbance might supervene, which would render it impossible for her to be removed.

"But we don't know who she is," said Mary. "She came to see father and fell down suddenly like this."

"Well, surely you can find out her name, can't you?" said the doctor, who was an intimate friend and privileged to scold or laugh or remonstrate, as he pleased. "So clever a young lady as you, Mary, can't fail to ferret it out. Where's her pocket-handkerchief? Isn't her linen marked?"

"Yes, 'E. P.' But that doesn't tell us much, doctor. And here are the things that were in her pocket, but I have not liked to look at them. Here is papa—shall we look at these things in the poor girl's pocket, papa?"

"We must know her name if we can; there can be no doubt about our duty in the matter," said the doctor brusquely; and then he took up the handkerchief and the purse. "H'm! a dainty bit of stuff—embroidered 'E. P.' Suppose you make a list of the things, Mary. There's a pencil. One embroidered handkerchief, one Russian-leather purse, containing—ah—gold, I see, twelve pounds in gold; h'm-m-m! seven shillings and sixpence in silver, threepence-halfpence in bronze; two

keys, an envelope and paper—crumpled, writing upon

it. This is the clue perhaps."

The doctor read what was written with compressed lips, then raised his eyebrows and looked at the rector. "This is your affair, I think," he said. "Shall I read it aloud? It's no secret, I fancy, and if it is, we are all three to be trusted."

"Yes, read it, Marsh," said the rector gently.

The paper was the one which Mr. Watson had left for Elfrida's use. The doctor read the superscription first: "'To be given at my death to Miss Elfrida Paston, now resident at Kesterton Park, Kesterton, Southshire.' The date is some years back, I see. You knew Anthony Kesterton once, didn't you, Austin?" Then he read the inclosure—that if Elfrida Paston should ever find herself in trouble or perplexity, she was to apply to the Reverend Austin Clare, once curate of St. George's, Bloomsbury, and since then rector of St. Fillan's-in-the-South, Bishopsgate Street. "This must be what brought her here, then," said the doctor, looking again toward his friend. "This girl is Elfrida Paston. Where have I heard the name?"

Mr. White's hands were trembling a little, and his fine face worked nervously. "I think I understand," he said. "Poor girl! poor girl! And to think that she was nearly turned from my door by that meddlesome old fool, Gibbons! Mary, my dear, there can be no hesitation about our keeping her. She comes from an old friend of mine. Poor old Watson, who wrote this paper, was very helpful to me in my younger days. I shall accept the poor child as a precious charge from him. Go and look after her, my dear; she may be wanting you."

Only when Mary was well out of hearing did the rector turn to his friend and say, with a shake of his head, "I fear also that this is Anthony Kesterton's

daughter under another name."

"Why do you say that?"

"Partly because of the likeness. The girl is the image of him. 'Elfrida' was a family name of the Kes-

terton's. Paston may be her husband's name-Mary

says she wears a wedding-ring."

"But this letter was addressed to 'Miss Elfrida Paston.' No, no, it can't be her married name! Now where have I heard the name before? I have it!" said the doctor, with a little smile. "Did you not see some mention of a disputed succession case in the papers a little while ago? It never got into the courts, but it has been a good deal talked of in society papers-"

"My dear Marsh, I never read society papers."

"Ah, no; but even in ordinary papers there has been some mention of it. And then there was an advertisement for a record of the marriage, if ever it had taken place, between Anthony Kesterton and some woman-I forget her name."

"Mary Derrick," said the rector, quickly. "Yes, that was the entry she was trying to find in the registry of

marriages."

"Ah! Well, all we can do," said the doctor, rising, "is to watch for signs of returning consciousness on Miss Paston's part. She must not be left alone for a moment. Can Mary undertake that? Shall I send in a nurse?"

"For the night-work, perhaps. In the daytime the girls will manage it all. Poor young lady! I wonder whether her friends have missed her yet, and where they

are. I wish we could relieve their anxiety."

"We shall probably see an advertisement in a day or two-or you might send one yourself to the daily papers," said Dr. Marsh. "But I would wait until to-morrow. She may come to herself and be able to give you her address. I'll see Mary again, please, before I leave."

He saw Mary, and gave her various directions, then went away promising to send a nurse before nighttime, and telling her to keep the patient perfectly quiet.
When the morning came without any sign of con-

scious life, Mr. White debated anxious'y with the doctor as to whether any advertisement should be put in the paper. But he was counselled to wait yet another day, in expectation of some printed notice of a

young lady's "disappearance."

Of course none came. Philip was the only person at present who had any interest in Elfrida's doings, and her message to him, through Mrs. Graves, gave him some reason to suppose that she was safe and knew what she was doing. But on the third day of her absence he set to work to investigate the City churches, for to one of these he gathered from Mrs. Graves' report that she had gone. As it happened, however, he began with all the wrong ones first, and only reached St. Fillan's at the very end of his search.

Elfrida's illness did not turn to brain fever, as the doctor had at first anticipated. On the third day the stupor yielded; she opened her eyes and looked with bewilderment on the kind faces of the fair-haired girls about her and the pretty furnishings of the dainty

room. "Where am I?" she said.

"You are with friends, dear," Mary answered, soothingly, "and we are taking good care of you. Take a little of this and go to sleep; you had better not talk

just yet."

She gave her some nourishment, which the girl took obediently. Then Elfrida sank into a restful and natural slumber, and Mary, leaving the nurse in charge, went to report to her father the change that had taken place in the patient's condition.

For two or three days afterward she was too weak to

say much; but at last she began to ask questions.

"Do you mind," she said one day to Mary, with the prettiest accent of wistfulness in the world, "do you mind telling me who you are?"

"Of course, dear. I am Mary White, and my father

is a clergyman."

"But how do you come to be taking care of me?"

"You came to see my father, and fainted while you were talking to him. So we brought you here and took care of you a little. You are better now, you see."

"But when—when was that?" said Elfrida, a look of

trouble showing itself on her wasted features.

"Only a little while ago-not long." Mary had been

cautioned against telling the patient too much.

"Not long," Elfrida repeated, dreamily. Then, in a livelier voice, "But why did I want to see your father? I don't think I know any Mr. White."

"No, dear, but he used to be called Mr. Clare-Austin

Clare—and you came to him."

"Oh, yes, I remember—I remember. I was to go to him in any trouble or perplexity, was I not?"

"Yes, dear; and he will help you if he can."

There was a little silence, during which Mary saw some tears slip slowly down on the girl's pale cheeks. But she sedulously devoted herself to her knitting, and took no notice. Presently Elfrida spoke again.

"I am in great trouble and perplexity, I think.

Could I see your father and talk to him?"

"Had you not better wait until you are a little stronger, dear?"

"Oh, no; I would rather see him now. How long is

it exactly since I was taken ill?"

"Five days," said Mary, rather reluctantly.

"Five days! And nobody will know what has become of me," she said, lifting her head, with dilated eyes and flushing cheeks.

"We will let them know, dear. Don't worry yourself, and it will be all right," said placid, comfortable Mary. "Shall I send a letter or a telegram anywhere?"

"I would rather see Mr. Clare first," said Elfrida, sinking back upon her pillows with a wearied look. "I

know he will tell me what I ought to do."

Mary went at once to her father, and told him what had passed. The account brought the rector-at once to Elfrida's room, where, sitting down by her bed, he took her hand gently in his and asked her how she felt.

"Oh, I am quite well now, thank you," she said, rather feverishly, "and I think I ought to get up and not

trouble you any longer."

"But you are not troubling us at all, my dear child. Your friend, Mr. Watson, who sent you to me, was an old friend of mine, and I shall be pleased if I can do

anything for one in whom he was interested. Suppose you tell me your name and your history, and see whether I can help you."

"I don't think any one can help me," said Elfrida.

The tears of weakness rose to her eyes as she spoke.

"Can I not send word to your home where you are? You must have friends who are anxious about you now."

"Only one," she breathed rather than spoke.

"But that one, my dear?"

"It is my husband," said Elfrida faintly. "His name is Philip Winyates. He does not know where I am. But I think it would be better that he should not know. He does not want me now."

And then she turned so faint and seemed so much exhausted that Mr. White refused to continue the con-

versation until the morrow.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE RECTOR'S STORY.

But on the morrow she would not be denied. She was evidently stronger, and she insisted upon seeing the rector once again.

"I will not be so silly as I was yesterday," she said bravely. "I don't know how it is that I am so weak.

I will do better to-day."

"Well, I hope so. But you must not tire or excite yourself, Mrs. Winyates—"

He used the name purposely. Elfrida flushed all

over, and then turned very pale.

"Oh, please call me Elfrida!" she cried almost child-

ishly.

"Elfrida, then. It is a name I have often heard before—when I was younger. There was a celebrated beauty in the Kesterton family, of whom I have heard Sir Anthony speak—"

"Oh, you knew him—you knew him? That makes it much easier to speak to you. I want to tell you about

myself, if I may. My mother's name was Mary Derrick—my father's—"

"Was Anthony Kesterton, of course," as she paused

in some agitation. "Well, my dear?"

"But why do you say, of course?" she asked anxiously.

"I gather it from the circumstances," he answered, smiling. "Mary Derrick was the maiden name of Sir Anthony's first wife."

"But how—how do you know? It is what we have been trying to find out—for so long—whether he

married her. Oh, do tell me how you know!"

"I know," said Mr. White quietly, "because I married them."

"You married them? And you are sure-sure-"

"Sure as the law could make us. My dear, do not excite yourself. How is it that you have not known of this before? Are you the only child of the marriage?"

But to this question Elfrida responded only by a passionate flood of tears. "Henry—it is Henry I am thinking of," she said at last, when she was able to speak distinctly. "If he were only here! Oh, why—

why did I not come to you before!"

Little by little she poured the story of her mother's and brother's lives into his ears: her own she kept in the background, for she was more anxious to let him hear of the two whose lives had been spoiled and ruined by Sir Anthony's silence than of herself. Her own story she could tell him later; at present she did not want to speak of it.

The rector listened with deep attention and gather-

ing indignation.

"But, my dear girl," he exclaimed more than once, "Anthony Kesterton must have been mad!" And when the coil went on unravelling itself and Lady Kesterton's denial of the story was told, he shook his white head with a sadness which he evidently could not put into words. When Elfrida had finished speaking he kept silence for a minute or two.

"You have had a hard trial, my dear," he said very

kindly, at last.

"Oh, I have, I have!" sobbed Elfrida, the very foundations of her nature seeming to be broken up by the sympathy and comprehension with which her story had been met. "It has been far worse than I can ever tell. Nobody understands: I have lost everything in life I care for: I wish I could die!"

"But you have your husband!"

"He does not love me. He cares for some one else. And there is some one that I—I thought I was going to marry-before him. It was that wretched secret of Sir Anthony's that spoiled our lives. If we had known, everything would have been so different!"

"We must try to mend matters now," said the rector

gently.

"It is no good. What is done cannot be undone. My mother died of a broken heart; my brother was a cripple nearly all his life and died with a shadow of disgrace over him. What is the use of trying to put things right now?"

"You care for their reputations, surely. You are happy to be able to do so much. You can lift up their names out of the mire, and show that they are worthy of respect. That is surely a great work for you to be able to do."

He had touched the right chord. Elfrida's agitation became less. She listened with more patience than she had done. "You will help me?" she said. "And will you not tell me-how-how it happened that you came

to marry them?"

"I was in the Highlands," said Mr. White, "with a party of young men, whom I was coaching, when I came across Anthony Kesterton, whom I had known at Oxford. He seemed flushed and excited, and drew me aside at once, telling me that he had something important to say. It was this—my dear, you must forgive me if I hurt your feelings—he was at a village inn with Mary Derrick, whom he had persuaded to leave her home under a promise of marriage. She learned—too late—that he did not mean to perform that promise,"

Elfrida hid her face. The story was more painful than

she thought it would be.

"I believe," said the rector slowly," that this poor girl, Mary Derrick, had a pure and loving nature, and that she had been persuaded with great difficulty to travel to Scotland in order to meet him at Perth. He had contrived this, because he wished to baffle pursuit or avoid discovery. He met her at Perth, and at once took her off to this remote Highland inn, where he expected that she, having no resources, would dispense with the ceremony of marriage, and become his misress-not his wife. But Mary Derrick, it seems, was so horrified by this discovery that she fell into a violent fit of hysterics, then into one fainting-fit after another. The landlady and other women had to be called into council; and in order to give a suitable pretext for her presence there he called her his wife. She continued in this hysterical state for some hours; and on seeing me he at once seized upon me to know if I understood what he called the ins and outs of the 'accursed Scottish laws' about marriage. You know, I dare say, that if two persons call themselves man and wife before witnesses in Scotland they may be held as legally married?"

"Yes. I know."

"He wanted to know if he had committed himself to this."

"Ah, he did not wish to marry her, after all!" said

Elfrida, in a tone of sharp pain.

"Well—at first—he made difficulties. But after a little conversation, my dear child, he came to a somewhat better mind, and consented to allow me to join them in the bonds of, I fear, a not very happy married life. I married them a few days later in the inn parlor, with the landlady and one or two people from the village as witnesses. The marriage was registered in the usual way, and you could obtain a copy of the certificate any time by applying to the authorities of the district."

"Did Sir Anthony ask you to keep it a secret?"

"Not exactly. He intimated that he did not wish the marriage talked about, but would divulge it when he saw fit. I saw John Watson about it once, but Watson had promised not to tell until Sir Anthony gave him leave. And I believe he exacted a promise from his poor wife that she also would not betray the secret. He put it on the ground of his mother's objection to a marriage beneath him. I heard of the first Lady Kesterton's death and of his remarriage through my friend Watson; but he wrote little and infrequently; and when I heard a few months ago that Sir Anthony was dead and the title had devolved upon the son, I took it for granted that it was all right, and that either your mother had had no boys, or that her son had succeeded."

"Did you know that she had ever had any children?"

"I baptized you, my dear. That was when your mother was living in London, some time before old Lady Kesterton's death. Your father took her away to Southshire rather suddenly, and, owing to the fact that I was pressing him to make his marriage public, he quarrelled with me, unfortunately, and said that he would never speak to me again. When I heard that he had taken his wife to Kesterton, I simply believed that he took her there as his wife. I am deeply grieved now to learn that this was not the case."

"He was wicked—wicked!" said Elfrida, with passion.

"He had no love for any of us—no pity. Poor Henry used always to say that he was kind and good at heart;

but he never showed his kindness to me."

"And you say your father meant to tell all the world on your twenty-first birthday, but was prevented. Ah! sometimes God does not permit us to make atonements; it is one of His ways of punishing wrong-doing," said the rector gravely. "But, my dear, you, as Sir Anthony's daughter, must remember that such was his intention, and judge him accordingly."

Elfrida made no answer in words, but the little shake of her head was more expressive than words could be.

"You must learn to forgive," said the old man, in

his gentle tones. "Else how can you ask for forgiveness? And now, my child, there is business to be done. Will you give me your husband's address, and let me communicate with him? Surely he must be suffering tortures of anxiety on your account."
"I don't think so. I think he will be glad," mur-

mured Elfrida. But she added the address almost im-

mediately.

"I will telegraph to him," said the rector.

"Not to come here! Not to see me!"

"Not to see his wife?"

"No, no! I can't bear it yet. I don't want him to

come. Oh, let me tell you-"

"Tell me the rest of your story another day," said Mr. White soothingly. "At present I am sure you have had enough talking. Your husband shall not see you unless you wish. When you are stronger, perhaps you will be able to meet him. Now I will send Mary to you, and say good-by."

He did so, and then went downstairs, intending to look for one of his younger daughters and with her aid concoct a telegram to send to Philip Winyates. But his intention was frustrated. A servant met him with the news that Mr. Winyates was waiting for him in the

study.

The rector's face was a trifle sad and severe as he entered the study. Elfrida's shrinking from her husband had not predisposed him in Philip's favor. It seemed to him that a man could not have been a kind or loving husband when a wife displayed such dread of a meeting with him. And then he thought that if Mr. Winyates had been very anxious to find her, he might have found her before now. So there was a little austerity in the manner with which he greeted his visitor.

But a glance at Philip's worn and haggard face went far toward dispelling the prejudice that he had formed. The younger man had been standing, but advanced toward the rector with some eagerness when he entered

the room.

"I beg your pardon for troubling you," he said, with

a nervous twitching of the lips which he could not control; "but I have heard that you have a lady staying

with you—a lady—"

"Sit down, Mr. Winyates," said the rector gravely. "I was just on the point of telegraphing to you, as your wife has this moment given me your address. She has been ill, and not able to speak much before to-day."

His previous suspicions were very much modified when he saw the man sit down suddenly, as if his strength had failed him, clasp his hands over his working features, and give vent to one or two of those choking sobs which are only heard from men in an agony of pain—or of relief from pain. "Thank God!" came between the gasps. The rector was glad of that. He put his hand on Philip's shoulder.

"Thank God, indeed!" he said. "She has been ill; we feared that she might have brain fever. But we

have safely tided over the danger now."

"I must thank you, too—you have been good to her, I know," said Philip, raising his head. "But I have had a bad time—a very bad time," he added, apologetically.

"You had no idea where she had gone?"

"Not the least in the world! The landlady gave me a sort of confused message from her—that she did not know when she would be back; but, of course, I expected her that evening. All that the woman knew was that she had spoken of some church in the City. I have been trying ever since to find out what that church was, on the chance of finding her. I only found yours to-day; and your clerk told me that a lady had been here, and had been taken into your house on the day that Elfrida left home. So I came to you—although I had almost lost heart."

"She came to me because of a paper which she had found in her desk—a few lines from Mr. Watson, of Southborough, recommending her to apply to me in case of need. I presume that Watson, knowing her true name and history, had a premonition of evil, and therefore put a weapon into her hand. I am sorry that she did not use it before her poor brother was gone,"

"A weapon! What—what can that mean?"
"It means, Mr. Winyates, that Mr. Watson knew that I was the man who married Sir Anthony Kesterton to Mary Derrick, the parents of Henry and Elfrida Kesterton."

"You-married them! Then the story was true?"

"You doubted it?"

"I did not know what to think. I never doubted Henry's word, but I thought that he might have confused the facts. Elfrida-my wife-will be rejoiced indeed."

"Rejoiced in a sense, but with an admixture of

sorrow, Mr. Winyates."

"Yes, yes; poor Henry!"

Philip was vaguely conscious of some undefined coldness in the rector's manner, also of a certain expectancy, as if he were still awaiting some speech which Philip had not made and ought to make. It was perhaps the inquiry that now fell from his lips:

"Can I see my wife?"

"I am afraid that she is scarcely strong enough to see you to-day."

"But-you have seen her?"

"Yes, and tired her out, I fear. But I have a great deal to tell you, Mr. Winyates. I should like you to hear the whole story, and then you can decide what had better be done in your wife's interests."

"Yes, yes! of course I am anxious about all that for her sake; but—first of all, I should like to see her—I must see her—just for two minutes."

"I am afraid you must be patient, Mr. Winyates."

"But just to look at her! Not to speak, not to"-Philip broke off at this point, for he noticed a singular expression on the rector's face. He burst forth with a question: "Is there any special reason why I should not go to her?"

"Just this," said his host kindly; "she is very weak, and she has asked that she may be allowed to gain a

little strength before she receives you."

"You mean that she has refused to see me?"

"Only for a day or two," said the rector, rather deprecatingly; but he was taken aback by the effect of his communication, for Philip Winyates turned to the mantel-piece so as to conceal his face while murmuring-

"My God, what a fool I have been! But this I did

not deserve!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

RIVALS AND ENEMIES.

"Tell me all," Philip said at length. "What has she said of me? I have been thoughtless, I confess; but I have never ceased to love her for a moment. Why does she refuse to see me?"

"Mrs. Winyates seems to think," said the rector,

"that you ceased to regard her with affection-"

"And does she care?" cried Philip.

"Certainly she cares. My dear sir, you and your wife seem to be involved in complete misunderstanding of each other's motives. I have not had much conversation with your wife on the subject; but I certainly gathered from her that she was much grieved and pained by your want of love for her."

Ah! But that may not mean that she cares for me!"

"At any rate," said the rector, "I think you had

better defer any attempt to see her to-day."

"Of course—of course; I would not try to go near her. But if you have any influence over her, sir, may I beg you to use it in my favor?"

"I will if you can assure me that your wife has no

cause for her want of faith in you."

Philip groaned. "She thinks she has, I'm afraid; but it is not true. If only you would tell her so, perhaps she would believe you. I swear to you that I have no love for any one but herself. I have never been guilty of a moment's unfaithfulness to her, even in thought. If only I could see her, I think I could convince her of that-if she would but let me talk to her about it. But I never knew she cared."

The conversation was interrupted by the ringing of a bell, which Mr. White interpreted to mean dinner-tea; and he invited Philip most cordially to remain. His prejudice had melted away completely, and he was as ready to take Philip's affairs into his keeping and consideration as Elfrida's. It was not the first time that he had been the recipient of confidences from husband and wife, and had tried to make peace between them. He was hopeful of putting things right now; and after tea he got Philip back to his study and had a long talk with him about Elfrida and the circumstances of her marriage. Philip, for his part, was absolutely unreserved, and to the rector he unfolded a story his wife had never heard; the story of his dead love for Lady Beltane, and of the way in which she had kept him dangling at her side for so many years, until it seemed as if the pith of his manhood had been taken out of him. And then he told of the way in which Elfrida had roused him, and, though she did not love him, had sent him forth to lead a new and higher life; then of her consent to marry him when Lord Beaulieu had slighted her, and of the months of married life that had followed, And then—then—

Philip faltered here, with the sense that there was something to tell which he would rather have left unsaid.

"The lady of whom you speak," said the old clergy-man, gently, "of course you have not seen her more than was unavoidable since your marriage?"

"Ah, that's just what I have done!" Philip burst

forth; and then he told the rest of his story.

Mr. White was pretty well prepared for Elfrida's version of the same events when he visited her next day. But, somewhat to his surprise, he had great difficulty in getting her to talk of her married life.

"My dear," he said at last, "I think I must tell you that I have seen your husband."

"Seen—Philip?"

"Yes; he has been here. He traced you himself, without my having to send a telegram. He went to every church in the City, I believe,"

She showed only a languid interest.

"He is very much worn out by his efforts. been straining every nerve to find you."
"You really think he cared?—" with a fine, sceptical

smile

"My dear," said the rector, laying his hand on hers, "when I think of the 'Thank God!' that came from his lips as soon as he knew that you were here—and safe; when I remember the tears that fell from his eyes as he uttered that thanksgiving, I cannot help but think that he loves his wife more dearly than any one in the world."

She seemed a little moved and surprised.

"I suppose I do not understand men," she said, somewhat pathetically. "They seem able to do things which to me would be like treason—and think nothing of it. I am sure I should not care to talk to any other man (if I loved my husband)—or to sit holding his hand-or anything-"

Her voice trembled; she put up her hand to brush

the moisture from her eyes.

"I know what you are alluding to, my dear; but your husband has assured me that what you objected to

will never happen again."

"It ought never to have happened at all," she cried, with sudden fire. "It never would have happened if he had loved me-never, never, never!"

"Do you care so much, then, for his love?" said the

rector, keenly.

"I do not care at all," she said; and then burst into passionate tears that belied her words. But she would say nothing more. And she would not see her husband.

The doctor advised that she should not be distressed or forced into anything distasteful to her until she was stronger; and therefore she was for the present let alone. Mr. White assured Philip that it was a pleasure to him to keep Elfrida with him; the girls had all fallen in love with her, and he hoped that she would stay as long as possible. And he also hinted that it would be advisable never to take her back to Taviton

Square, to the house which was so full of bitter memories to her, but to provide some pleasanter dwellingplace, where she might gently recover from the effects of the pains and perils of the past.

"Will she ever come back to me?" said Philip sadly.

"Of course she will. It is only a question of time."
"I should be only too glad to provide a pleasant house if I knew that she would come to it. But in the present

uncertainty—it is difficult—"

"Well, at any rate," said the rector, with a smile, "when she comes into her fortune she will be able to live where she pleases. Seventy thousand pounds, at least, is it not? I should advise you to take her abroad."
"I shall not live on my wife's money," said Philip

shortly.

"Ah, my dear Winyates, if you and your wife truly love one another, it will not matter very much to you whether the money was yours or hers. I married a rich woman," the old man went on simply, "but we never had a moment's ill-feeling as to which side the money came from. If a man and woman are truly united, truly one, there can be no jarring over trifles of

In spite of the rector's brave words, however, he was rather less confident than he appeared. Elfrida's feeling against her husband was very strong; and as long as she refused to see him he did not know how the breach was to be repaired. He had promised her that Philip should not be brought into her presence against her will, and he did not think himself justified in countenancing amiable wiles on the part of his daughters, who wanted very much to bring the husband and wife face to face, even against their will.

But although the rector of St. Fillan's-in-the-South

was not going to break his promise for any man or woman, there were things which he deemed himself at liberty to do in order to forward a reconciliation between Philip and Elfrida. And he had his own little plot at heart, which he did not divulge to every one.

Elfrida was so much stronger that she could sit up in

an arm-chair in the pretty little sitting-room, on the same floor with her bedroom, which had been appropriated to her use. She was strangely and persistently weak, however. But she was just well enough to enjoy the petting that the girls lavished upon her, and the flowers they brought her, and the pleasant gossip with which they entertained her from time to time.

One afternoon, however, they pleaded engagements of various kinds, and asked if she would mind being left alone. She did not mind it at all, and, as she was supplied with the most recent novel, and a little dainty 4 o'clock tea, she resigned herself to laziness and

quiet.

She was trying sedulously to fix her mind on the woes of the heroine of her book, but not with great success, when the door behind her opened softly and closed again. She thought that it was the maid come for the tea-tray, and did not look up until the rustle of a silk-lined skirt betrayed the presence of a well-dressed woman and not a maid-servant. Then she started forward as if she could not believe her eyes. For the woman who stood before her was her old enemy, Beatrice, Lady Beltane.

Elfrida started to her feet.

"Don't get up," said Lady Beltane, imperturbably. "I did not mean to disturb you. Sit down; I won't stay more than five minutes."

"This is an intrusion—an impertinence!" said Elfrida, breathing very quickly, and stretching out her hand to

the bell.

"You needn't ring," said her visitor. "I thought you would; so I told them that if they heard a ring they need not mind it—I would let myself out. It is your host, your pet parson, your deus ex machinâ, who has sent me up here—Mr. White, Mr. Clare, whatever his name is. Yes, he told me to come, so you need not try to send me away. I am an authorized intruder."

Elfrida was of a passionate nature; and she wished most heartily at that moment that she could strike the woman before her to the earth or turn her bodily out of the room. That was the first wild impulse. Then she recollected herself, and was ashamed. But above everything she became conscious of her great physical weakness; for the slight exertion of rising, together with the surprise of seeing Lady Beltane, had been too much for her, and she sank back in her chair, white, gasping, and on the point of a fainting-fit.

"Good gracious!" said Lady Beltane. "I did not mean to upset you like this. Where are your smellingsalts? There, are you better now? Dab your forehead

with this eau-de-Cologne—is that all right?"

Elfrida found herself compelled to say "Thank you," for Lady Beltane fulfilled the duties of a nurse with wonderful dexterity. When at last she could murmur, "I am better now," Lady Beltane put down the smelling-bottle and eyed her with good-humored scrutiny.

"You do look ill!" she said at length. "You've had a bad time, have you not? Mr. White told me. I thought I should like to see you for five minutes. You

might give me that much of your attention."

She stood regarding Elfrida curiously, and Elfrida returned the gaze with a sort of helplessness. What could she, in her weak and wavering state, do against this brilliant, successful, self-assured woman of the world, who had so easily obtained the mastery of her?

"You look worse than I thought you would," said she at length. "Worse, in the sense of prostration, I mean. I don't think you have lost your good looks. May I sit down? Mr. White came to see me three days ago."

Elfrida's pale cheeks crimsoned, but she did not speak. "He's quite a saint, that old man, isn't he?" said Lady Beltane carelessly. "You can't think how nicely he spoke; made me feel quite a sinner for a little bit. I did not give in to him, however. I sent the poor old thing away in quite a depressed frame of mind, I believe; but afterward I thought over what he said, you

come to see you."

Elfrida found her voice at last. "I do not want to hear—anything," she said.

know. And then I made up my mind that I would

"Not even that you are a very great fool?" said Lady Beltane good-naturedly. "Now listen to me, Elfrida Winyates—Elfrida Kesterton, as I suppose you ought to have been called in the old days. I acknowledge that we all behaved shamefully to you. Betty's nearly breaking her heart over it now. But we were in a difficult position as well as you. We did not really know anything about you. You came among us at Kesterton Park as a stranger—young, friendless, nameless, perhaps, and dangerously pretty. You took—I don't say by unfair means—Beaulieu's heart away from Betty, and Philip's from me. Looking at the thing all round, don't you think it was only human nature for us to hate you?"

"Betty didn't," said Elfrida, almost childishly.

"No, Betty didn't; but she's a baby. I am a woman, coming to the end of my tether, getting older and uglier every year; and I resented your triumph."

"But you are married, and Philip Winyates is not

your husband."

"No, little innocency; but I never loved my husband, and I loved Philip. I can confess it now, because—yes, this is true; I have ceased to care for him. I resign

him to you!"

"Because you are tired of him! Thank you—I cannot accept my husband at your hands," cried the girl, with an intensity which thrilled even the nerves of the usually impassive Lady Beltane. She looked up with

a strange gleam in her beautiful blue eyes.

"You mistake," she said. "I am doing only what necessity forces upon me, whether I like or not. I never had the slightest hold upon him from the moment you appeared upon the scene. Philip has never wavered in his allegiance to you for my sake from that moment to this. So much I can confidently assure you,"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

RECONCILIATION.

ELFRIDA could not hear this assurance without agitation. In spite of her desire to appear calm, her eyes dilated, her breath came fast, and her hands clutched the sides of the arm-chair in which she sat. Lady Beltane, who had seated herself opposite to her and continued to observe her with great attention, noted these signs of troubled feeling and pursued her speech.

"I tell you frankly I have tried all I know to win him back again. I will tell you everything-don't ask me why: it is because I choose. Before you came, I knew his love for me had long been dead. It died very soon after my marriage, although we kept up a pretext of flirtation and love-making. But it was a chain that soon galled him. I knew well enough that he did not care for me long-long before he fell in love with you."

"Then why—why—"

"Why prolong the agony? Well, I liked to think that I had some power. I liked the world to believe that there was a great deal more behind our friendship than appeared on the surface. But there was nothing behind. The facts were these: Philip had been jilted by me before I married Beltane; and when I met him after my marriage I wanted to subjugate him again. But it was a very short and incomplete subjugation." And Beatrice shrugged her shoulders, perhaps to hide a momentary thrill of pain.

"Was it all—a pretext, then? Was there nothing in

what the world said?" asked Elfrida.

"Nothing on his side, my dear. He cared no more for me than for the kitchen-maid. He was sorry for me because I was unhappy—you know he could not be ungentle to a woman. But he did not love me, though I—yes, I will tell you all—though I—loved him."

"You love him still!" said Elfrida, below her breath. She was sorry that she had said the words when she

saw Lady Beltane's face.

"Let sleeping dogs lie," said Beatrice, after a moment's pause. "There is not much need to go into my feelings, is there? It is his you care about. I asked him to run away with me once. Yes, child, don't look so shocked, I did. And he refused. I was then so angry that I vowed to be revenged on you—that was all. Now do you understand?"

Elfrida's lips framed the one word "When?"

"When? Oh, you mean when did I make that disgraceful offer of mine? At Kesterton Park, my dear, before you were engaged to him. He repulsed me—kindly, you know, but firmly, as people say. I tried to make it up with him at the ball—you remember? But after that time I scarcely spoke to him (except once to promise to love his wife—a nice little falsehood, wasn't it?) until after your brother's death, when I came with Betty."

"And then?"

"Then I tried the old dodge, dear; I pretended to sympathize with him over an unloving wife. But that wouldn't do. He would not hear a word against you. That was when we used to sit downstairs in the diningroom and talk. We talked of nothing but you. I had begun to be tired of it when you turned the tables on me so nicely by inviting me to call on you. Then I thought I would make my last try—I would talk about myself. I wrote to him that I was very miserable, and would he meet me in the Square—you know when! Meeting in the Square! Rather like a servant-girl's proceeding, wasn't it?"

"Oh, go on!" said Elfrida.

"You impatient girl! Well, I met him, and I talked about Beltane's unkindness and my misery, and all the rest of it. It was then that you saw us together. You need not have been jealous. He was giving me the prosiest, most didactic lecture that was ever poured into a woman's ear—all about my duty to my husband! You might have heard every word of it. All that he did in the way of affection was to take my hand in his, and tell me very seriously that I was in a bad way, and

must mend, or I should go to the dogs altogether. He did not use exactly those words, but that was what he meant."

Elfrida was silent; a little shame was creeping into her heart.

"After that, I gave it up," said Lady Beltane hardily. "I told myself that I was a fool to go on caring for a man whose whole soul was wrapped up in his wife; and I determined to go abroad this autumn and never see him again. And I don't want to see him again—nor you either, Mrs. Winyates! So, there, you have my story!"

"But what brought you here?" Elfrida asked, fixing her candid gray eyes hungrily on Lady Beltane's fair,

powdered face.

"Ah, that's telling!" said Beatrice brusquely. Then, after a little silence: "Well, it was just this. I could not bear to think that the woman whom Philip cared for was throwing away her happiness and his for the sake of a little bit of jealousy. And when your Mr. White came and told me in his sweet, earnest, old-fogy way that this was the case, and couldn't I do anything to remedy it, and so on, I began to think that I would not be a dog in the manger, at any rate. I may be bad, but I'm not spiteful—now that I have thought things out. Philip cares for you with his whole heart, and you will be a bigger fool than I take you for, bigger than ever I have been myself, if you refuse to believe in him."

She was a good deal paler than usual, but her eyes were frank and her tone sincere. Elfrida rose and came toward her with outstretched, trembling hands.

"Will you forgive me?" she said. "I did not under-

stand. I am sorry I was so hard."

"You're not fit to stand," said Lady Beltane practically. "Forgive you? I think it's the other way on: you ought to be forgiving me—or at any rate, I ought to be begging for your forgiveness. I believe I am sorry, Elfrida. Will you kiss me? I shall never cross your path again."

And the two women who had been such bitter enemies exchanged a long quiet kiss of forgiveness and peace. There were actually tears in Lady Beltane's

eyes as she put Elfrida back into her chair.

"I don't mean to be sentimental—I never was," she stated presently, "but Philip and Mr. White together have been rather too much for me. I'm going to try the experiment of making love to Beltane—at least of being nice to him. I've not been in the habit of being nice to him, you know. He is a very good sort—in his way. I shall take him abroad, and keep him there for a bit; and—by the by, you are going to take Philip back into favor, aren't you?"

Elfrida blushed, and the tears came to her eyes.

hope he won't be very angry with me," she said.
"Angry with you! Don't you know that he worships the ground you tread on? And you-haven't you learnt to love him too, Elfrida?"

But Elfrida's answer was given with something of her old spirit. "I must tell that to him first-if it

is so."

"Ah, well, perhaps you are right. But when you have made it up—as I know you will—you might give Betty a hint to that effect. She is keeping Beaulieu dangling on, without accepting or rejecting him; and I know it is all because she thinks that you care for him still."

"Indeed I don't!" said Elfrida quite indignantly.
"She may be quite sure of that. I will tell her so

myself."

"Do, if you can. And now I must go. I have stayed far longer than the five minutes for which I bargained. Shall I tell Mr. White to send for Philip? Good-by. I hope you will soon be stronger; and let me congratulate you on your access to fortune-and other things. My cousin Eva is almost out of her mind with rage; but you won't mind that much."

And then she swept her trailing silken skirts out of the room; and Elfrida, left alone, could do nothing but lean back in her chair and cry a little for sheer weakness and tenderness of heart. For indeed her heart was very tender just then toward her husband. And perhaps it was fortunate for him that at this moment he was sent upstairs to her by Mr. White, who had been holding him in reserve, so to speak, as a fitting con-

clusion to Lady Beltane's visit.

Philip came hesitatingly-almost reluctantly. He knew nothing of Beatrice's explanation, and was almost unwilling to enter his wife's presence before she had sent for him. But to his immense surprise, as soon as he stood before her, and began some awkward, incoherent sentence, she flung herself straight into his arms.

"Oh, Philip, will you forgive me? I ought to have trusted you—but, indeed, I did not understand!"

"Not understand that I loved you, my darling?"

"No, I did not. But Lady Beltane has been here-"

"Lady Beltane!"

"And she has told me everything. Nothing but good of you-you may be sure of that. And I am so sorry

that I did not trust you enough before."

"But, Elfrida," said Philip, who felt as if he did not quite know whether he stood on his head or his heels, "what does all this mean? It sounds almost as if you

cared a little bit for me too!"

And she, hiding her face on his shoulder, murmured softly, "I have cared for you a long time, I think. Ever since that day in the library at Kesterton-only I did not know that I cared. Everything seemed full of pain and confusion. But I know now."

"Say it, Elfie; say 'Philip, I love you.'"

"Philip, I love you," she said, obediently; but she added in a fervent crescendo-"with all my heart and soul—as much as ever I am capable of loving. Will you forgive me, Philip dear?"

"My darling!" he said; and after that, it is to be feared that the conversation ceased to be worth re-

cording.

Mr. White had been waiting downstairs for some time in great anxiety as to the result of his experiment in peace-making. That the result was satisfactory may be gathered from a few words of a conversation between him and his favorite daughter, Lina.

"I never knew such a take-in," Lina averred, indignantly. "We all of us thought that Elfrida was so

sincere!"

"Poor Lina!" said the rector, pinching her ear; "she is disappointed to find the world not so given up to

malice and uncharitableness as she hoped."

At which Lina pouted a little. But she was soon reconciled to the new order of things, for Philip came and went like a brother, and Elfrida blossomed out into a very different person from the Elfrida they had known. She had been a listless, drooping, melancholy woman before; she was now bright and spirited and vivacious, though without losing the little shade of gravity behind the brightness, which showed that she had known the meaning of sorrow.

She heard incidentally that Lord and Lady Beltane had gone abroad. What had become of Betty she did not know; but at last Betty came to see her, and mentioned in a carefully careless manner that she had been staying with the Mainwarings, who were, as Elfrida knew, intimate friends and distant relations of Lord Beaulieu. "Then it is all settled?" Elfrida asked, with

a smile.

"Settled? Oh no; nothing is settled."

"I wish it were," Elfrida spoke, with gentle emphasis.
"I should like to see you as happy as Philip and I are—
now."

Lady Betty gave her a swift, inquiring look, to which

Elfrida replied in words.

"Yes, it is quite time. I love Philip—I never thought I could love any one so much! He is more to me than

any one in the world!"

"I am very glad," said Betty; and there was a shy light in her blue eyes which it pleased Elfrida to look upon. But she was not surprised when the girl rather hurriedly changed the subject. "And Lady Kesterton?—she knows all, of course, by this time?"

"Oh, yes. Philip and Mr. White went to her solicitors and told the whole story. Then a responsible clerk was despatched to Scotland to find out all about the marriage. They say it was all quite plain sailing when once they had got the clue: it was simply the first step that was needed."

"And what does Lady Kesterton say to it all?"

"Oh, that is the most extraordinary part," said Elfrida, her color rising. "Lady Kesterton declares that it is all a plot, and that not a word of the story is true. She says that the certificate is false; that the clerk was bribed—everything mad and foolish that you can think of. She means to fight the case, she says, to the end."

"She must be mad!"

"It seems almost like madness. We sent a proposition to her—a sort of family arrangement—by which I should give up half my share of the money to little Janey: neither Philip nor I would have minded that, All that we ever wanted was the establishment of the marriage—our right to be called Kesterton. We did not care about the money—Henry and I. But she absolutely refused it: she said she would take nothing from me, and that she did not mean to surrender one penny of Janey's fortune."

"She will be forced to surrender it! And then per-

haps she will repent."

Even while they were then speaking a telegram from Lady Kesterton was to its way to Philip—a telegram which spoke of at least a change of mood. He received it that afternoon and took it at once to Elfrida, with a question as to the answer.

"I want you and your wife at once at Kesterton Park,

Come at once! A matter of life and death!"

"Shall we go?" said Philip, looking into his wife's eyes.

She hesitated a moment; then answered "Yes,"

CHAPTER XLIX.

CONFESSION.

ELFRIDA was yet far from strong, and Philip was very doubtful as to the prudence of taking her on so long a journey. But she was resolved to go. It could be from no ordinary motive that Lady Kesterton had tele-graphed for her, it could be no foolish exaggeration that caused her to term it "a matter of life and death." Lady Kesterton was not given to foolish exaggerations, or to actions caused by rash impulse. She was a cold, hard-headed, calculating woman. If she wanted to see Philip and his wife thus suddenly, it was because some new discovery had been made, or some new decision arrived at. Perhaps she wished to make tardy reparation to poor Henry's memory. With these contingencies in view, nothing could have persuaded Elfrida to stay behind, although Philip earnestly wished that she should let him go down first alone, and send for her should necessity arise. But she persisted in going with him, and his prudent scruples had to give way.

It was with some foreboding of a painful or difficult scene that she spoke to Mr. White before she left the peaceful retreat of St. Fillan's rectory, where happiness and success had been so long in waiting for her. "I don't know why," she said, "and it may be a very foolish idea of mine, but I feel as if something terrible was coming, and I wish-I wish you would give me your

blessing before I go."

She had come to him in his study and knelt at his side as she preferred her request; and he laid both hands on her dark head and uttered the words of blessing for which she craved.

And remember, my child," he added, "that the first

duty of Christian man or woman is forgiveness."

"I will try to remember it," said Elfrida softly.

"Don't ask me more just yet." And then she said good-by to him and went away.

They had started at 7 o'clock, and it would be half-

past 9 or more before they arrived at Southborough. The day had been hot, and it was pleasant to exchange the lifeless air of London for the cooler breezes of the country. The long August day faded before they arrived at their destination, and the cloudless blue of the summer sky was obscured by masses of threatening cloud, at which Philip looked with some anxiety. "We shall have a storm before long," he said to Elfrida, as the train steamed into the Southborough station. "I hope we shall be able to get a fly."

There was no difficulty in this. And Philip breathed a sigh of relief as he handed his wife into the stuffy little carriage. He was glad that the more serious part of the journey was over, and although he thought that fatigue had made his wife's face look very pale, he was disposed to think that she had accomplished the jour-

ney with considerable success.

The roads were very dark. Now and then there was a rumbling of thunder in the distance. The flyman drove very slowly, and it was nearly 11 o'clock when Kesterton Park was reached. As the countrymade carriage drove lumberingly up to the house, the front door was thrown wide open, and a blaze of light flared forth upon the drive. Philip saw that the butler was standing upon the steps.

"Anything wrong?" he asked rather sharply.

"We don't quite know, sir," the butler answered diplomatically. "My lady seems a little anxious, but she begged me to ask you to go up to her at once, as soon as ever you came; she was expecting you."
"Go up to her now?—where?" said Philip, as he

helped his wife to alight.

"In her own room, sir. And she begged that Mrs. Winyates would choose her room, sir. The west wing has been built up again, but the room occupied by the late Sir Henry," with a deferential glance and a lowered voice, "is always locked now, and so is Sir Anthony's room. With these exceptions, sir, the house is quite at your service; only my lady said that she hoped you would go to her at once-both you and

Mrs. Winyates—as the matter was urgent."

"We will go," said Philip, with a glance at his wife, "when you have brought Mrs. Winyates a glass of wine or some soup or something. Yes, Elfrida, you must not go up without taking food; you look very tired."

"I shall not be five minutes," said Elfrida deprecatingly; "if there is anything ready—"

"The cook has soup, ma'am, I believe," said the butler, and he led the way into the dining-room, where the dishes were already placed upon the table.

"I am ready now," said Elfrida, after she had swallowed a few mouthfuls of soup and wine. "I could not eat anything more, Philip; I am quite ready. Come."

She gave him her hand as they went into the hall and up the stairs together. A footman went before them, as if to show them the way; an unnecessary piece of formality when they both knew the house so well; but the household had leagued itself to do honor to the long unknown and discredited daughter of the house, in default of the brother who had been its rightful owner and had been virtually cast out of its doors. All the servants, as Elfrida learned later, were up in arms against Lady Kesterton; all had given notice to leave.

The woman's coldness and harshness had been bearable so long as they had associated it with rigid justice and honesty; but now, when, as they believed, she had lied and cheated in order to keep two friendless orphans out of their inheritance, not one of her servi-

tors had a good word to say for her.

At the door of the ante-room which led to Lady Kesterton's apartments, the footman bowed and retired. Philip looked at Elfrida; she was very pale. "Shall we knock?" he said.

"Yes-knock."

He knocked, and before the door was opened a long vibrating roll of thunder seemed to pass above their very heads and shake the house. "The storm has begun," said Philip, quietly. But Elfrida made no answer; she was trembling from head to foot.

The door was opened by a nurse in white cap and apron: evidently she had expected them. In a moment she laid her fingers on her lips, then she admitted them, closed the door again, and led them across the antechamber to Lady Kesterton's own room. "So Lady Kesterton was ill!" That was the thought that crossed the minds of Philip and Elfrida. Ill and wishful to make restitution; perhaps even to ask forgiveness. Elfrida wrestled with herself. She did not feel—in spite of her promise to the rector—as if it would be easy to forgive Lady Kesterton.

But when the inner door was opened, an unexpected sight met her eyes. The room certainly contained the paraphernalia of sickness. There were medicine bottles on a little table; a steam-kettle filled the air with vapor. A hot bath had recently been prepared. Although the weather was warm, a small fire blazed in the grate; but the air was already growing colder as the storm burst

overhead, and the room was not stiflingly hot.

It surprised Elfrida to find that the invalid was not Lady Kesterton. No, for she was sitting in a low chair, with a child on her lap. It was one of her children who was ill; and to those who knew Lady Kesterton best a whole vista of possibilities was opened up by

the fact of the child's illness.

The boy—for it was Gerald—was wrapped in a blanket, and was lying on his mother's knee in such a position that he could inhale the steam from the kettle. His loud rasping breath, his flushed face and look of fright, showed plainly enough what was his ailment. It hardly needed the nurse's significant murmur,

"Bronchitis and croup," to explain the situation.

But his mother! Elfrida and Philip had seen Lady Kesterton many times in moments of agitation, sorrow or affright, but they had never seen her look as she looked now—never seen the stony despair that looked out of her eyes on any mortal face before. She had thrown off her widow's cap, and her fair hair, streaked with gray, was pushed back from her forehead in uncharacteristic disorder. Her forehead was lined, her

mouth drawn at the corners, her blue eyes looked ghastly in their orbits of purple and yellow. The last few months-perhaps even the last few days-had added years to her age. Her eyes were full of anguish, but her mouth was even worse to look at than her eyes; for it was grimly, rigidly set in an expression of mingled defiance and despair.

"I thought you would never come," she said, addressing herself at once to Elfrida in hoarse, unnatural tones. "I have been waiting hours for you; and I

thought my boy would die."

"I am very sorry," said Elfrida, gently, but in extreme wonderment. "We came as soon as we could."

She knelt down beside the mother and child, and put back the damp curls from the child's brow. In the dead stillness of the room the boy's heavy panting for breath was the only sound that could be heard. Outside the house, the wind was roaring and the rain dashing against the windows. And now and then the thunder boomed like a signal overhead.

"Poor little Gerald!" Elfrida murmured. "I did

not know that he was so ill."

"You are sorry for him?" she said, in the same harsh, strained tones. "Why should you be? He has been the reason why-why I have done many things that you ought to hate me for. I was not sorry for your brother when he suffered, was I? Why should you take the trouble to pretend that you are sorry for my son?"

"I do not pretend," said Elfrida, gravely. "I am

sorry for him because he is a child, and in pain."

"Well, perhaps you may be," said Lady Kesterton, with a long-drawn sigh, "and if you are, then you will perhaps be sorry also for me. I have nobody—nothing left me in the world but my children. If I lose them, I lose all. I would rather die than see my children dead. Don't you understand? You loved your brother; don't you know how it feels to care for a person more than for all the world beside?"

"I do indeed!" said Elfrida, pitifully.

Philip tried to interfere. "The child is quieter now,"

he said; "perhaps he will sleep. Had we not better leave you now and see you again in the morning? I

am afraid we are only disturbing him."

Lady Kesterton turned her wild eyes upon him with a look of bitter mockery. "How much you know!" she said. "How much you understand! We don't disturb him; or if we do, it is only for a minute or two. I sent for you on a last chance. Is the nurse there? Send her away. I want to speak to Elfrida and to you."

Philip glanced toward the nurse, who, with an openly-affronted air, at once retired to an outer room. When the door of communication was closed Lady

Kesterton spoke again.

"He has been in terrible danger more than once," she said. "I thought that he would have died this afternoon—when I telegraphed to you. For it came to me quite suddenly last night, when I was sitting beside him, that it was perhaps a—a sort of judgment upon me—a punishment, you know. I was cruel to another woman's children once—and they say God knows, God remembers, and that the sins of the parents are visited on the children. So that—because I was cruel to Henry—Henry Kesterton—perhaps God was going to take away my son from me."

She spoke with a tragic intensity which chilled the hearers' very blood. Even Elfrida, with a quick revulsion of feeling, cried out "Oh, no, no, that cannot be!" as if she had never been injured by the woman who was now striving as passionately for the life of her only son. And Philip, also moved, drew near and laid his hand on his wife's shoulder. But Lady Kesterton, unchecked by their gestures or their exclamations, went on, moistening her dry white lips with her tongue

before she spoke,

"I thought that perhaps—if I did all I could to make amends—He might relent. Not forgive; I don't expect His forgiveness. But if I did what I could to put things right, He would perhaps spare me my child. It seems so cruel to torture a little child for what its

mother may have done amiss, doesn't it? You wouldn't do that, would you? And if you—you, Elfrida—would pray that Gerald's life might be spared, then perhaps He would hear."

"I will pray—of course I will!" cried Elfrida. need not say any more. If my prayers can do any good-But you will pray for him yourself, and God will hear."

"No," said Lady Kesterton, still with the stony eyes that seemed as if they had lost the power of filling with honest tears. "I cannot pray. God would not listen to me. But I will tell you what I mean to do. You shall have all the money—all that I thought was Janey's, you know; and the jewels and everything. I will give you mine too. I can't give you Gerald's, because I have no power over his things. But everything else you can have. And I will write a paper, if you like, saying that Henry spoke the truth, and that I did hear Sir Anthony acknowledge him as his lawful son. I would not say it before because I was so angry, and I wanted everything for Gerald. But I will say it now. I will say anything, if only Gerald does not die!"

"Dear Lady Kesterton, that is quite enough," said Elfrida gently. "Indeed, I hope that Gerald will get better. You must not distress yourself so-it is bad

for him. I understand all that you mean to say."

"Perhaps I have not said enough," said the mother, clasping the child closer and rocking it backward and forward upon her breast. "But I cannot say anything else. For Gerald's own sake, I can say no more. It is no use to give him back to life with a tarnished name, is it? Oh, have I not said enough to atone—to atone for what I did?"

"It is enough—I am sure it is," Elfrida said, replying to she knew not what. "Henry forgave everything before he died, and so do I. We will pray God together—will we not, Philip?-that poor little Gerald may not die."

"Pray aloud," said Lady Kesterton, with feverish eagerness. "Say it aloud—so that I may hear. Perhaps it may do me good too. I have not prayed for so long. Why do you wait? why don't you go on? Don't you see that he may be dying, and you are wasting the precious time? Oh, go on, go on!"

Elfrida was almost appalled by the heathenish superstition of the woman. It was not faith; it was a mere childish belief in the efficacy of prayer as a charm. Nevertheless, Elfrida forgot everything but the needs of the human beings before her, and prayed aloud, as she knelt at Lady Kesterton's side, for the recovery and preservation of Lady Kesterton's little son.

CHAPTER L.

RECANTATION.

SUDDENLY Lady Kesterton uttered a sharp cry. E1frida stopped short—the words frozen upon her lips. It needed but a glance to tell what had happened. The child had become worse; a paroxysm of choking had come on, and was already making him almost black in the face. The nurse was hurriedly fetched from the other room, and some strong remedies were hastily applied. During the terrible moments of the crisis, Lady Kesterton kept entire silence, but her eyes were never once removed from the convulsed features of the boy's little face. For a short time they did not know whether he would not die, then and there, before their eyes. But at last the crisis seemed to pass; the danger was, for the moment, averted; the child lay comparatively peaceful and quiet upon her knee. But the nurse whispered a warning into Elfrida's ear.

"Keep the steam going, please, ma'am," she said. "My lady's no management. If it goes down and he gets chilled at all, it will be all over; he'll never strug-

gle through another of these attacks."

She spoke very softly, and Elfrida replied in the same

tone.

"I will watch very carefully, and if I see the slightest change I will call you. Go and rest, nurse, for a little while; I and Mr. Winyates will stay here."

The nurse nodded and went into the next room.

frida thought that the words could not possibly have been overheard; but Lady Kesterton seemed to have grasped the sense of them.

"He could not get over another attack! that was what she said, was it not?" she asked, fixing her eyes

on Elfrida.

"He has not much strength," said Elfrida softly, and she could not bring herself to say more. But Lady Kesterton understood.

At last a slight—very slight—change came over the child's face. Was another convulsion about to follow? Elfrida gave an anxious look to the steaming kettle and to the position of the child's head. He seemed quiet again, but the movement called life back to Lady Kesterton's dull blue eyes, and eager words to her livid lips.

"I knew it!" she said. "He will not live! I have

not done all I might have done!"

"Hush, Lady Kesterton, for the child's sake, keep quiet," said Philip. But she turned upon him angrily.

"It is for him I speak. It is for his life. I know—I know God will not let him live to comfort me while I have a lie upon my lips. But I will confess. I will tell the whole truth." Her voice rose to a wailing shriek, inexpressibly painful to listen to. "It was I that killed his father—I killed Anthony Kesterton! I am a murderess! Oh, yes, look at me as you like: I am not mad. It was I that gave him the overdose of chloral that killed him, because I did not want him to live and acknowledge Henry and Elfrida before the world. I have suffered since—yes, but it was I who killed him—for Gerald's sake. And God will not forgive me, and Gerald will die!"

There was no time to be lost. Elfrida took the child into her own arms, and Philip caught the fainting, agonized woman as she slipped sideways from her chair. Neither he nor Elfrida attached very much importance to what she had said. They thought that her nerves were unhinged with watching, and her brain tottering from exhaustion and grief. The nurse, hearing the

sound of bustle and confusion, came in, and helped Philip to carry her to another room. Elfrida was left with little Gerald until they were able to return to her.

Possibly the soothing influence of Elfrida's purer and warmer nature had some power over the child. At any rate it seemed as if, from the moment when Elfrida took him in her arms, he grew easier. His breathing became freer, his skin cooler; a gentle dew stood on his forehead, and the eyelids closed in a quiet slumber. When morning dawned at last, the boy was wonderfully better, and the doctor, who rode over from Southborough, fully expecting to hear that the child was dead, found him on the high-road to recovery. It was Lady Kesterton who now stood most in need of his professional skill. She was confined to her bed, and not allowed to see anybody but the nurse and Elfrida. It was for Elfrida that she asked every day, and would not be satisfied until her visit had been paid.

Philip would have been glad now to leave the house, but he was obliged to stay, for without Elfrida the whole place would have been in disorder. And he would not leave her there without him. She begged him more than once to go back to town, but he absolutely refused. "You are too precious to be left behind," he said one day; and then, more gravely, "besides, I do not care about leaving you with Lady

. Kesterton."

"Oh, Philip! but you do not believe the extraordinary things that she said when she was wild with anxiety about Gerald?"

"I do not know," he said gravely. And Elfrida asked

no more.

It was curious to find herself even temporarily at the head of the great household where she had felt herself so unhappy and misprized for many a weary year. There was no doubt as to her position now. She was the late baronet's daughter, and one and all hastened to do her bidding. Personally she had always been liked, and she was now popular because she did not bear malice for the snubs and offences which she had been obliged

to endure in the old days. The county people, hearing that she was there, and agog to know all that was going on, began to call on her. Philip was proud of his wife's bearing at this as at every other time. She was not elated, she was not supercilious, she was not even bitter: she was simply gentle, grateful for kindness, but thoroughly independent in spirit.

One of her greatest pleasures now was her renewed intercourse with little Janey, of whom she had always

been extremely fond.

The child ran into her arms as soon as she saw her, but when the first embrace was over, looked up into her face with a questioning expression which Elfrida could not wholly understand.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.
"Are you coming back to stay here, Miss Paston?" said the child. How the name thrilled Elfrida with old associations!

"You must not call me that now, darling. Call me Elfrida-Elfie; that is what I like. You are my little sister now; do you know that?"

"Your sister?" said the child.

It was evidently a new idea to her. She looked ear-

nestly at Elfrida, and then heaved a great sigh.

"What is it, darling?" Elfrida asked coaxingly-for she saw that the child had something on her mind. But to her great surprise Janey instantly began to cry. "They said—you were naughty—you and Harry—and

you were both sent away because you were naughty. You aren't naughty now, are you?"

"Not a bit," said Elfrida cheerfully. But the words

gave her a pang. They showed her the way in which she and Henry had been spoken of in their father's house.

It was the remembrance of that little talk which came to Elfrida's mind a few days later when she was sitting quietly with Lady Kesterton, who was now recovering from her illness. Janey came running in with some flowers, and Elfrida took her upon her knee and praised the bouquet with tender, endearing words. Looking up, she saw Lady Kesterton's eyes fixed upon her, and by a sudden impulse she turned to her and spoke, with Janey's arms still tightly clasped about her neck.

"Janey tells me," she said, "that you once told her Henry was—what she calls—'naughty.' I want you to

tell her now that he was good-always good."

Janey's arms clung a little tighter. She was very much afraid of her mother now. And Lady Kesterton kept a strange silence, with her eyes still fixed upon Elfrida's face.

"You owe me this," said Elfrida, with sudden vehemence. "Clear his name to the child, at any rate; she

will believe you, and perhaps the world may not."

It was the hardest word that she had ever said. But Lady Kesterton's silence drove her into cruel speech. Perhaps Elfrida judged her harshly. Lady Kesterton spoke, in her weak, unemotional voice.

"Janey," she said, "look at me!"

The child looked, with a twitching mouth. She was

ready to burst into tears.

"Janey, I want to tell you that Henry-you remember him?—was good and kind. If I said he was not, I was wrong. You are to love him; he was your brother, and he—I believe he loved you."

Surely no exhortation to love and kindness was ever conveyed in a colder voice. Elfrida listened in amaze. She could no more have said words like these without warmth and tears and glow of feeling than she could have struck a flowing river to ice. The amende was made indeed, but not as she would have had it madein love and penitence.

"Send the child out of the room," said Lady Kester-

ton. "I want to speak to you."

And then, when Janey had very gladly escaped, she turned her cold eyes on Elfrida's face and spoke again.

"You thought I would not keep my word," she said.

"But you are wrong."

"No, I did not really think that. It was a momentary doubt, for which I beg your pardon," said Elfrida frankly. "I was a little hurt by what Janey had said of

Henry."

"I wish to tell you that I meant what I said—about making amends. I will let all the world know that I—I lied about Sir Anthony's story."

"We don't need that," said Elfrida. "It will be

better to keep the thing as quiet as possible,"

"Ah! you don't understand. I said that I would do it, and I will. But there is one thing more. I believe—I said—other things." The words came out with difficulty: it was evidently a great effort to her to say them.

"Oh, but we do not remember them," said Elfrida soothingly. "You were overwrought, and did not

know what you were saying."

"Yes, that is what I mean. I did not know. Of course it was not true." Her eyes were still fixed upon Elfrida's face, and her breath came faster in the pause. "I—had nothing to do with Sir Anthony's death—nothing at all," she said. But her face was deathly white.

Elfrida hastened to reassure her. Neither she nor

Philip had thought of these words again, she said.

"I don't know. Philip looks at me—he makes me nervous. And the nurse, I think she heard. Oh, you believe me—you understand, don't you?" said the wretched woman, with a sudden clutch at Elfrida's hand. "You will never let anybody think of it again?"

And Elfrida promised; but went out of the room in a state of greater amaze and anxiety than ever. For, judging from Lady Kesterton's manner, either she was

a guilty woman or she was not sane.

But after this little outbreak things went placidly enough. Gerald rapidly recovered health and strength, and Lady Kesterton followed his example. They were both so much stronger that toward the end of September Elfrida and Philip thought themselves justified in returning to town. They could give no further assistance to Lady Kesterton, and their stay was not much of a pleasure either for them or for her. They drew a long breath of relief when they got out of the house, and vowed that nothing short of dire necessity should

ever take them to Kesterton Park again. Elfrida had prevailed on some of the older servants to remain; she had extracted permission from Lady Kesterton to settle a large sum of money on little Janey as soon as she came into her own fortune; and she was allowed to take the child back with her to London. Therefore she was light of heart, and considered that she had obtained

more favors than she had any right to expect.

But toward December a rumor came to Philip's ears which filled him with uneasiness. He had never been convinced, as Elfrida was, that Lady Kesterton's confession on the night of Gerald's illness had been entirely caused by over-fatigue and hysterical sensibility. These characteristics were not consistent with Lady Kesterton's nature. The confession of her guilt with regard to Henry's right was true enough: why, then, should she have gone on to confess a design against her husband's life, unless that were true also? Philip did not exactly put his suspicions into words. But he had the feeling that there was something which he did not know, and he was glad that nobody but himself and Elfrida had heard what Lady Kesterton said.

But his gladness was premature. The rumor that came to him connected Lady Kesterton with Sir Anthony's death. And the source seemed to be the nurse who had been sent into the ante-room in order that she might not hear. She had heard, and she had tattled; and strange reports were beginning to float about. It was said that the Government would take the matter up; that there would be an inquiry; that Lady Kesterton would be examined. And Philip felt bound at last

to tell these rumors to his wife.

"Oh, poor thing!" said Elfrida, innocent and unsuspecting. "How she must be suffering! Philip, let us

go down to Kesterton at once and see her."

Philip thought that Elfrida was a trifle over-generous, and that to go to Kesterton was a work of supererogation; however, he yielded to her gentle persuasions, and they set off, on a wet autumnal afternoon, for Southborough and Kesterton Park.

CHAPTER LI.

THE AVENGING SEA.

When Philip and Elfrida arrived at Kesterton Park, about 7 o'clock in the evening, they were greeted with an unexpected piece of news. Neither Lady Kesterton nor little Gerald was in the house.

"Have they gone on a visit somewhere, then?" said Philip of the housekeeper, whose mysterious face seemed to show that something was amiss.

"No, sir; her ladyship has gone to a house in Kester-

ton village, so as to be near the sea."

"To be near the sea—at this time of the year?" asked Elfrida almost incredulously.

The housekeeper coughed discreetly behind her mit-

tened hand.

"Step in here, Mrs. Bates," said Philip, turning aside from the hall and the listening servants to a small room which he had been in the habit of using as a little

study, "and tell us what it all means?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say, Mr. Philip," said the housekeeper, in a confidential tone. It was only in moments of confidence that Mrs. Bates forgot herself so far as to call him "Mr. Philip," but the appellation had a homely, friendly sound in Philip's ears. "It seems," she went on in a lowered tone, "that she has lately taken a great dislike to the Park, and has been wanting to get away from it ever since little Sir Gerald was ill in the autumn. She said she thought it was unhealthy with all the trees round it, and that the drainage was not right, for Sir Gerald kept on getting colds and sore throats, and she said that it was because the place wasn't bracing enough. And about a week ago she got into a dreadful taking because the little fellow—Sir Gerald, I mean, begging your pardon, sir-seemed poorly, and she said she would go down to the sea for a few days and see what that would do for him."

"But where has she gone?"

"You know the little white villa with green shutters,

called Sea View Lodge, don't you, sir? It stands away from the village a little, close to the beach, almost."

"Do you mean to say that she has gone there?"

"Yes, sir, she has; and taken Sir Gerald and the maid—and that is all."

"I have never been inside the house," said Elfrida; "what is it like?"

"Cold, draughty, badly built," said Philip shortly. "Not a suitable place to take a child to in winter-time."

"And some folks say-not very safe, sir," said Mrs.

Bates, in a significant tone.

Philip stood silent for a moment, and Elfrida read in his face that he was struck by the suggestion. She thought of the situation of the house. It has already been mentioned that a portion of the land on which the village of Kesterton was built had been reclaimed from the sea by a former lord of the manor. The village stood in a gorge between two hill-sides, and in old days it was well known that the sea used to creep up to the very end of this cleft in the hill-side. An elaborate construction of dykes and earthworks now set a limit to the waves; and these being now partially overgrown with grass and planted with trees, the reason of their existence was partially forgotten. Of late they had fallen somewhat into disrepair, as Philip knew well; for he had many times tried to impress upon Sir Anthony's mind the necessity of keeping the breakwaters in good condition. But Sir Anthony had been hard to stir to action; and since his death, almost a year ago, nothing at all had been done by way of preservation. The older inhabitants of the village were in the habit of shaking their heads doubtfully when the safety of these constructions was mentioned; and many of them had removed as far as possible from the seaboard, and planted their dwellings on the hill-sides, where they felt themselves safe from the treacherous inroads of saltwater. But the little white villa, of which the housekeeper spoke, stood close to the "sea-banks," as the earthworks were generally, though somewhat vaguely, called. Even in summer, visitors would sometimes

shrink from inhabiting it, if the weather were bad. They said the waves that struck the banks seemed to make the house tremble to its foundations. For years it had been prognosticated every autumn that some coming tempest would level it with the ground; but nevertheless it still stood, and was regularly let during the season to summer visitors.

Philip did not like to feel that Lady Kesterton was alone at this place without proper warning; so he set off at once for Sea View Lodge, with the object

of seeing Lady Kesterton himself.

It was not until he got down into the gorge that he began to estimate the strength and fury of the wind that was sweeping up from the sea, and howling through it as if it were a funnel. The night was very dark, and the great waves were dashing over the breakwater as if they spurned the petty obstacle. Once he came across a fallen tree; once a tile and part of a chimney crashed in the road behind him: the elements seemed to be let loose, and death and destruction were threatened to all who opposed their course. Every moment the wind roared louder, and every moment the waves seemed to leap higher and more widely.

He paused for an instant at the village inn and exchanged a word or two with the landlord, whose opinions as to the safety of Sea View Lodge in a storm corresponded with his own. "It be a wild wisht kind of a place," he said; "no moor fit for a tempest than a house o' card-board. My lady's London born—she doan't know; and in the thick big house o' her'n on the hill she no thought o' what the storms are like down here. You get her away, Muster Philip, and bring her and the little measter up here; we are safe enough, and

the walls are main an' thick."

Philip walked quickly to the house, determining to persuade Lady Kesterton—if persuasion were allowed—to take this course. The well-built, substantial old inn had weathered a hundred storms; it stood with its back to a rocky side of the gorge, and was as much sheltered as it could be. But the little white villa, built for

summer-time, looked marvellously frail to him as he drew near. He could almost imagine that he saw it

shaking at every blast that blew.

He had to knock twice, and loudly, before the door was opened. A very white, scared-looking maid-servant, in whom Philip recognized a former nurse of the children, opened the door.

"Oh, Mr. Winyates, sir! Oh, I am so glad you have

come!" she gasped.

"Why so, Mary?" Philip asked good-humoredly, as he helped her to shut the front door-a task which the fury of the storm rendered a somewhat difficult one.

"It's my belief, sir, that the house will be down about our ears before the night is out," said the girl excitedly; "and I can't get my lady to listen to a word. She says it's all nonsense."

"I want to see Lady Kesterton," said Philip. "And, Mary, you may as well be putting some of her things together. I have come to take you all up to the Kester-

ton Arms."

"Thank goodness for that!" said Mary to herself, as she showed Philip into the little drawing-room where Lady Kesterton sat alone. Philip caught the words, and could not help smiling at the tone of heart-felt relief in which they were uttered. But his smile vanished when he caught sight of Lady Kesterton. She was sitting in a strange, crouching attitude close to the fire. There was a look of stony horror, a whiteness of the lips, which Philip was shocked to see. Was she alarmed by the storm?

"Good-evening, Lady Kesterton," he began gravely.
"I hope the storm has not alarmed you."

She raised herself a little and looked at him with a strange, blank gaze, as if she did not see him at first. Presently the look of sight came back into her eyes, accompanied with surprise and inquiry.

"Philip!" she said. "Why are you here?"

"I heard that you were at this house, and came down to warn you that it was not safe-"

"What! all the way from London-for that?"

"No, there was another reason for my coming from London; but I will tell you of that to-morrow—or a little later to-night. At present I want to urge you to come with Gerald and your maid to the inn, just for the night. I assure you this house is not safe. It is in a very exposed situation, and I have long been expecting to hear that an accident had happened to it. You must come away at once."

"Come away? But that is impossible, Philip!"

"Why impossible? It is but a short walk to the inn, where you will be at least comparatively safe; and to-morrow you can remove to the Park—"

"Oh, no, no-never to the Park! I will never enter

the house again!"

"As to that, we can talk the matter over to-morrow; but at present, Lady Kesterton, it is for to-night that I am anxious. You must leave this house at once. Listen to the wind—it gets stronger every minute. I have already told Mary to get your things ready. I will carry Gerald myself."

"It is for Gerald's sake I have come here. I don't

see any reason for going away."

"Not even when you hear the wind and the sea?"

He might well say that: for at that moment a crash from the roof announced that one of the chimney-pots had gone; and a great splash against the window showed that the great waves were flinging showers of spray far over the breakwater and the banks. Lady Kesterton started to her feet: a more natural look of fright and agitation came into her face.

"Is there really danger to the house?"

"I fear so. You will come to the inn, I hope, at once."

"Yes, yes, I will come. Ring the bell for Mary, Philip," said Lady Kesterton, in a much fainter tone. "But not—not to Kesterton Park, remember! I will not go there."

"What is your objection to Kesterton Park?" said Philip, as they waited for Mary to answer the summons.

She stammered a little over her reply.

"The drainage is wrong-I am sure it is: we had sore throats there, and I could not let Gerald stay. I-I would go at a moment's notice from any place where

the drains were wrong."
"I do not believe that there is anything wrong with them," said Philip steadily. "And allow me to tell you, Lady Kesterton, that your absence from your home, and from your late husband's home"-he said the words with marked significance—"will give rise to more of the unpleasant comments that have already been made."

"Unpleasant comments!" repeated Lady Kesterton, facing him with an unmoved front. "What do you mean?"

"I will tell you to-morrow. Here comes Mary. Will you give your orders?"

"You are incomprehensible," said Lady Kesterton

scornfully, as she turned away.

But Philip noticed the way in which her hand clutched the back of a chair, as if to keep her from staggering as she walked; and he divined that she was

much more agitated than she chose to show.

She went out of the room with Mary; and Philip remained alone, growing more and more uneasy as he listened to the boom of the water and the savage howl of the wind, and felt the house quiver from time to time like a stricken thing. It seemed an age to him before Lady Kesterton and her maid reappeared clad in warm cloaks and bonnets. Lady Kesterton held Gerald in

her arms, and Mary had a little black bag in her hand. "Let me carry him, Lady Kesterton," said Philip. "And, for Heaven's sake, make haste! It is my belief that the roof of this house will be off in another ten

minutes."

"I will carry him," said she obstinately.
"You have no idea how strong the wind is. You had better take my arm and let me carry the boy. It will be safer."

"You shall not take him away from me!" she cried, with sudden fierceness, "I believe you want to take

him into danger. We should be safer here—you may

go with Mary: I will stay here, after all."

"You cannot be so foolish!" said Philip, sternly. "Listen to the wind—there goes another chimney-pot! We shall be in danger for a few minutes outside, I grant you; but not for long. And to stay in this gimcrack house means, I believe, certain death."

At these words Mary burst out crying; and Gerald—only half comprehending what went on, but frightened by the unwonted sounds about him—began to cry also, and clung tightly to his mother's neck. Lady Kesterton moved, however, in a dazed, uncertain manner toward the door. But she would not let him touch the child. "No, no!" she cried. "I will save him myself, as I saved him from the horrible house up there, where Anthony used to come every night and clutch the boy's throat. He never came here—never here!"

The words lingered in Philip's memory, inducing a new and awful fear. Was it possible that there was something wrong with this poor woman's brain? What did she mean by that ghastly reference to her dead husband? Or—low down in his heart the thought insisted on repeating itself—could it be that she had had any-

thing to do with her husband's death?

He never forgot the fears and dangers of that dark walk from the villa to the inn. The distance was short; but the road was rough and uneven, and the wind was furious. It blew them forward, however, and acted as a friend to them in their need. They walked in the middle of the road for safety's sake; but even here they were not exempt from danger, for tiles were flying from some of the roofs, and the trees that grew here and there were breaking or being positively torn up by the roots. Philip helped Lady Kesterton as well as he could, but she would not give up her burden to him, and their progress was necessarily very slow.

When the little party at length had felt their way from the main road to the little side lane between two stone walls which led to the Kesterton Arms, firmly planted on a rocky plateau with its back to the everlasting hills, Philip drew a long sigh of relief, and glanced back to the foaming, billowing sea that they had left behind.

Left—not a minute too soon!

For even as he looked, a great rushing mass of water struck the dyke and poured itself against the very walls of the little summer villa. The house, which had hitherto been visible as a white patch in the darkness, seemed to collapse like a child's toy. Philip caught his breath and uttered a quick, sharp exclamation, unheard in the clamor of the storm. The house was gone! And what was the roar, the rush that followed? Ah, was it not what he had feared? The weak defences had gone down before that onslaught of the waters; and up the valley rushed the great wall of sea, carrying devastation in its path. Would even the inn escape? It stood high, certainly; but there was no knowing how far that terrible wave would reach.

Philip rushed forward—the women clinging in frantic terror to his arm. They were on the door-step by this time, clamoring to be let in. One moment, and

they would be safe!

But in one moment it is possible to be overtaken by destruction. It was not the water that assailed them, but the powers of the air. A great fir tree which had stood fifty years in the inn garden had been swaying dangerously for some time, and fell at that very moment across the very steps on which the party of fugitives had gathered. The maid remained almost untouched—Philip was smitten to the earth, but not much injured. When help came, and all four were extricated from their perilous position, it was found that the chief sufferers were those whom Philip had risked his life to save.

Lady Kesterton was alive but her back was broken, and the boy Gerald lay dead in his mother's arms.

CHAPTER LII.

COMPENSATION.

The dawn broke over a scene of terrible desolation in the Kesterton valley. The sea had reclaimed its own. The cottages in the lower part of the village had been wrecked or swept away, and there had been some loss of life and much loss of property. For the most part the people had been warned in time, and had gone to their friends on the hills, but there were some sad cases of old and feeble persons who had been swept away by the current or crushed by falling fragments of timber and masonry. Considering the extent of the

disaster, however, the loss of life was small.

The inn had remained untouched, either from the effects of wind or water. The great fir tree still lay across the door-step, and in the course of the morning as many of the village people as could reach the inn came to gaze upon its broken branches, and to whisper to each other the details of the calalmity that had taken place. Every one acknowledged that there had been no apparent means of avoiding it. If Lady Kesterton and Sir Gerald had stayed at the villa they must have been swept into the sea; and in that case Mr. Winyates and the maid-servant would also have been drowned. Philip had acted for the best; but it had been a choice of evils, and no human hand could have averted the destruction that had been wrought.

Elfrida came to the inn by a circular route early in the morning. The wind was abating, but a seething sea now rolled where once had stood quiet homesteads and gardens and a country road. The labor of years

had been swept away in a single night.

Philip met his wife at the door, drew her inside a little private parlor, and told her all the story that she had not already known. Ill news travels fast, and she had heard an account of the disaster before he came. Indeed, for some time she had believed that even Philip was killed; and the shock had so far unnerved her that

her husband tried to dissuade her from going into Lady Kesterton's room. But on hearing that Lady Kesterton was conscious and had asked for her, she insisted upon going. Poor little Gerald's dead body had been laid in an upper room; but Lady Kesterton had been carried into a sitting-room, where she now lay perfectly flat on a mattress spread upon a dining-table. Her face was ashen-gray, but there was no trace of pain upon it; and the coverlet was drawn closely up to her throat.

"She may say or do what she likes," the doctor murmured to Philip, as they passed each other at the door.

"She is beyond hope."

Elfrida shrank a little at the sight of the gray-white face; but then a feeling of compassion and womanly sympathy came to her aid, and conquered the momentary repulsion. She went forward and leaned over the dying woman, speaking some gentle and comforting words. But Lady Kesterton hushed her at once.

"Don't talk to me," she said. "I have something—myself—to say. I am dying, you know—the doctor has told me so, and I am—not sorry."

What could they say? From no point of view could they contradict her. There was a moment's painful pause, and then she went on in broken, unnatural tones:

"It is God's judgment—I acknowledge that," she said. "I tried to fight against Him—and I failed."

"We all fail when we try to fight aginst Him," said Philip. It was a truism, he knew, but there was nothing else to be said. "If we acknowledge our sins He is ready and willing to forgive us."

"It is impossible for Him to forgive me; I don't know that I desire it," said Lady Kesterton, in her old stony way. "But I am willing to accept this—all this—as retribution for my sin. I did it all—everything—for Gerald. And now he is dead, and I lie here dying -almost as Henry died, is it not? They tell me that my spine is injured, and that even if I lived I should be in constant agony. . . . Is there no retribution here?" "But, dear Lady Kesterton," said Elfrida gently,

"you have already made all restitution that was possible. Don't you remember how Gerald was given back to you, and how you told us that you had heard Sir Anthony's talk with Henry? In Henry's name I gave you his forgiveness; you know as well as I do how freely he forgave you before he died. So don't think of this terrible calamity as retribution."

Lady Kesterton looked coldly into her face.

"You do not know," she said, "or you would not speak in that way. If I had told you all the truth—if I could have made up my mind to sacrifice myself—then Gerald would be living still. I have killed him—that is what I mean by retribution. It does not so much matter what has happened to me."

Elfrida stood silent, not daring to guess the real significance of her words, not daring even to glance at Philip, who had come to her side and taken her hand in his. He knew by this time what Lady Kesterton

meant.

"I did not tell you everything," said the dying woman, looking straight into Elfrida's face. "If I had told you, perhaps God would have allowed me to save Gerald. You know I told—for his sake. But I kept silence about one thing—one thing only. Sir Anthony died—by my hand. It was I who gave him the overdose of chloral."

There was a strange, breathless silence in the room. Nobody seemed able to speak. Lady Kesterton contin-

ued, seemingly unheedful of the silence.

"I could not bear the prospect. He threatened to turn me and my children out of doors, and to put you and your brother over our heads. There seemed only one way of preventing it—his death would make everything easy for us. He died . . . you know what happened next."

"Then-were there any papers that we ought to have

had?" said Philip, quickly.

"Yes; they were in his desk. I destroyed them all. It does not matter now, because Elfrida's position has been proved without them. But they were all there—

marriage certificate, baptismal certificates, everything that could possibly have been wanted. I burned every scrap."

Again there was a pause, and then Lady Kesterton went on in a dreamy, reflective way, as if she had forgotten that anybody was beside her in the room.

"That was why I could not bear the Park any longer. The place where Sir Anthony had died was unbearable to me. I used to see him at nights. It seemed to me that he stood beside Gerald's bed, and laid his cold, dead hand on Gerald's throat. Whenever I had seen him do that Gerald woke up next morning with a bad throat. And I knew that Anthony would kill him before long, in order to punish me. That was why I let Janey go away with you. I thought that one of them might be spared."

"And Janey is spared," said Elfrida, softly.

"Yes, but not Gerald. Gerald is gone, although I took him away from the Park. He was safe at any rate from Anthony while we were at Sea View Lodge. Anthony never troubled us there. But, you see, the waters rose up against us, and the wind tore the roof from our heads; and when we escaped from sea and wind we were crushed to the earth, and Gerald was lost to me after all. God has His own way of avenging himself. It is no use fighting against God."

"Would you like to see a clergyman?" Philip asked,

after another silence.

A gleam of something like humor came into Lady Kesterton's blue eyes. "Why should I want a clergyman?" she said. "What good could he do me? It is perhaps better that I should die than that I should live. If I had been likely to live I could not have made that confession. It was some rumor about Sir Anthony's death that had got abroad, was it not, Philip? I thought so. Well, if it is necessary, you will be able to use my confession—I mean if anybody else were by chance accused. I'll give you a piece of evidence. I took away the bottle in which the chloral had been, and hid it in a secret drawer of my secretaire. You will find it there-in my room. I will sign a paper if you like.

I can use my fingers a little still."

"Oh, that is not necessary," cried Elfrida, impulsively. But Philip made a slower and graver answer:

"I trust that such a paper may never be wanted. It should never be produced without dire necessity. But perhaps it had better be written and kept for a few years."

Lady Kesterton's eyes rested on him with a look of

cold approval.

"You could always be business-like when you chose, Philip," she said. "Yes; get a piece of paper, and write what I dictate, then get somebody in to witness my signature." And when Philip had found writing materials she dictated in hard, sharp tones the words that she wished to leave behind her.

"I confess that I killed my husband, Anthony Kesterton, by an overdose of chloral, administered on the morning of the 13th of December, 188—." Such were

the terms of Lady Kesterton's confession.

The doctor was called into the room to witness the signature. The contents of the paper, which he took for a will, were of course not made known to him; but he saw the signing of the name, and was a little surprised in after-days to hear that Lady Kesterton had died intestate. The paper was never used.

When the doctor had gone, Elfrida and Philip remained with her to the end. Those last moments were very dark. One thing only seemed to bring comfort to her troubled mind—the assurance of Elfrida's for-

giveness.

"Henry forgave me," she murmured with her dying breath, "and you forgive—perhaps God will forgive me too."

Then the end came.

With Lady Kesterton's death, the atmosphere of deceit and intrigue which had hung about Kesterton Park for so many weary years was cleared away. "We have

no secret of our own to keep, thank God!" Philip once said to his wife, "and for the secrets of others the best cloak is absolute silence and forgetfulness. We will

not remember these old sad histories any more."

And she had concurred, although her eyes would fill with tears sometimes as she thought of Henry's frustrated life and the early close of his shadowed day. Especially she thinks of him whenever she goes to Kesterton village church; for in front of the pew in which she sits there hangs on the wall a marble tablet in which the name and parentage of Sir Henry Kesterton are recorded for all the world to see. Henry has had justice done him after death, if not in the brief period of his life.

For Elfrida is always at Kesterton now. It was to Philip's credit that he had never troubled himself about his chance of succession to the baronetcy. "It was ill waiting for dead men's shoes," as others besides him have concluded; and to Elfrida, who had never studied the family tree, it was something of a shock to find that on the death of Henry and of Gerald the title went to her husband, as well as the family estate and the money which Lady Kesterton had left to her eldest grandson. She could well afford to endow little Janey with the money which Sir Anthony's eldest daughter was to have inherited; and Janey's sweetness of nature and entire devotion to her sister was one of the many forms of recompense which came to Elfrida in later days for the losses and troubles of her earlier life. She had boys and girls of her own, to whom Janey was as helpful and loving, in turn, as Elfrida had been to her; and Janey was happy in the possession of a sweet, unquestioning, unsuspicious nature, which rested in a contented acceptance of all that came to her lot. She never knew the tragedy of her mother's life, or the secret that her father had kept to himself for so many years; and her recollections of Henry were involved in the golden haze which veils the days of childhood from our memories, and she remembered him only as the saint of the household, the boy with the beautiful face,

whose cheerfulness, unselfishness and patience were

joined to rare courage and a noble fortitude.

Long before these happy days, however, and soon after the settlement of Philip and Elfrida at Kesterton Park, Lady Betty Stormont arrived on a visit. She brought with her a face of sunshine and of tears; there was so much to relate, so much to explain, that, as she herself complained, she could never remain in the same mood for twenty minutes together. But by the end of the third day of her visit Elfrida discovered that Betty was much more quiet and thoughtful than she used to be; that there was sometimes a shade of absorption and even of sadness on her fair little face; and that she spent a great deal of time in looking out of the window.

"Lady Beltane is still abroad, is she not? Where are

you going to spend the next few months, Betty?"

"I don't know"-rather dolefully.

"Where is Lord Beaulieu?"

"Gone abroad too:"
"How is that, dear?"

"I suppose I sent him. I could not feel sure that I trusted him. It seemed to me that he ought—he

ought-" She stopped short and blushed vividly.

"Ought to have married me?" said Elfrida, with a smile. And as Betty's guilty look showed that she had guessed aright, Elfrida went on earnestly: "But, my dear, I refused him. And I have never been so glad of anything in my life as of that refusal. Why, I am far happier with Philip, in my own dear old home, than I should have been with Lord Beaulieu—little as you may think it!"

"Really, Elfie?"

"Really, dear! And—don't you think it would be well if you stayed the next few months with me? Beaulieu will be home again by and by, and it would

be pleasant to meet an old friend."

Betty demurred a little at first; but when she was quite convinced that Elfrida's happiness would not be in the least disturbed by Beaulieu's return, she consented. And—perhaps owing to a letter from Elfrida

herself to the young man-he very soon presented himself at Bewley Court first, and then at Kesterton Park, where he and Betty found a great deal to say to each other in the shade of the green beech trees. After which it became very speedily a mere question of time and of the fixing of the wedding-day.

It was when Betty's wedding was over, on a fine autumnal day, that Elfrida and her husband strolled together through the leafy ways of Kesterton Park, coming out at last upon the cliff from which they could see the ruined village in the gorge, now half filled with water from the bay. It had been decided not to undertake the work of rebuilding the sea-wall and the dykes just yet. New cottages were being erected on the higher part of the hill, and both Philip and Elfrida thought it better to spend their money for the good of their tenants than in trying to make a semi-fashion-able watering-place out of little Kesterton village. As they stood and looked at the glittering water, Elfrida said suddenly:

"The place is almost prettier than it was before!"

"So I think," Philip answered. "And I came across a curious old rhyme to-day, Elfie, which I had heard before, but forgotten. It is roughly scratched on a wall upstairs in the house, and is also to be found in an old manuscript. It has rather a curious significance." And he repeated the words:

> "Before the Northman is master Of land which is water and waste, Kester's lord shall see disaster. Nor shall there be end of sorrow and pain Till the land which was water be water again."

"The land which was water has certainly now become water again," he added, looking down at the glistening waves.

"And you—the Northman—are master!" Elfrida added, quickly. "And Kester's lord has seen disaster—it is true. There is something strange about these old propheies sometimes!"

"It was quoted to me by your great-grandmother,

Elfie, and I sometimes think that she must have had a gift of second-sight. I will tell you the story of her prophecy another time. At present, there is one question I want to ask."

"Ask it, Phil."

"Is there 'an end of sorrow and pain' for you, dear, as well as for me? Are you quite happy? Happy, satisfied—content?"

She slipped her fingers into his hand and turned

her sweet face to look into his eyes.

"Perfectly happy, Philip. Happy and satisfied. As long as you love me, my dearest, I shall be perfectly at rest."

Philip drew her close to him and kissed her on the lips; but he asked no more questions. For he saw the love-light in her eyes, and he also was content.

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